ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	POLITICAL BLOGS AND THE CHANGING DISCOURSE OF PUBLIC PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF PRE-PRIMARY COVERAGES OF 2016 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
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In the weeks leading to the primary of 2016 U.S. Presidential elections, the blogosphere was filled with new kinds of informal ramblings and profanities rarely witnessed in public discourses. The present study undertook content (textual) analysis of blogs and traditional news articles to examine a few research questions: If there were any noticeable shifts in language and discourse of traditional news that seemed to reflect the blogosphere; if the comparisons between blogs and traditional news indicate shifts in journalistic norms; the characteristics of intersecting relationship between traditional journalism and blogs; the possible impacts of blogs on journalistic standards of objectivity; and in the final analysis, in what ways does the influence of the blogosphere appears to be reflected in the headlines and language of non-blog journalism texts, whether overt or more implicit. The study analyzes 300 news items and indicates that blogs and traditional media have an influence on one another in

unanticipated ways. In conclusion, it encourages continuous explication of changing norms in news coming from, and influencing, alternative media. The study also proposes the "Blogosphere Model" following critical analysis of the mass media historiography.

POLITICAL BLOGS AND THE CHANGING DISCOURSE OF PUBLIC
PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF PRE-
PRIMARY COVERAGES OF 2016 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

Dedicated to the memories of my grandparents -
Jeje, Maa, Ajaa, Aai.

I am, but your blessing

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Professor Kathy McAdams taught me without instructions, advised me without suggestions, guided me without issuing directions. She made me realize my potentials and then, she just let me be. She saw in me the future that I could not. She overcame all odds in her life so they would be on my favor. If I have written this dissertation, it is not solely because she believed that I could, but more importantly, because she told me I should. Every page of this work and every phase of evolution in my research is owed to her.

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My lifelong love, my comrade, who lets me spread my wings and fly - Amrita. Without her support, solidarity and her wisdom, I couldn't have made sense of this world. Without her kindness, love and her patience, I couldn't have made sense of my own dreams. This is as much my work, as it is hers.

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My beloved comrade Pritha Kejriwal whose friendship and poetry inspire me. Pratyush Chandra whose visions complete me. My friend Sunanda Parekh for never

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Politics hates a vacuum. If it isn't filled with hope, someone will fill it with fear." – Naomi Klein

News and commentary in the months leading to 2016 Presidential Primaries—as well as before the subsequent election in November—were filled uniformly with widespread fear, despair, sexism, racism, and xenophobia (Norton, 2017; Frank, 2016; Marcotte, 2016; Posner, 2016; Bahadur, 2015).

Postscripts of the electoral season accused the traditional press of failing to uphold their principles as sacrosanct (Fournier, 2016; Kristof, 2016). At the same time, as their parallels, emerged the blogosphere with its capacity to circulate the sensational as the topical, and the irreverent as the norm.

One study confirmed that during the time of both parties' conventions, just eight percent of news coverage centered on policy and issues.[1]

Yet another, the Tyndall Report, claimed, "This year's absence of issues is an accurate portrayal of the turf on which the election is being played out." In a sense, the candidates may have decided for the media what issues, if any, needed to be covered.[2] And considering that most of the political talking points were devoid of substantive issues, the media by and large may have followed the pattern. Similarly, if the

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[1] Boehlert, E. (2016, October 26). Study Confirms Network Evening Newscasts Have Abandoned Policy Coverage For 2016 Campaign. *Media Matters.* Retrieved from https://mediamatters.org/blog/2016/10/26/study-confirms-network-evening-newscasts-have-abandoned-policy-coverage-2016-campaign/214120
[2] Tyndall, A. (2016, October 25). Comments: Issues? What Issues? *Tyndall Report.* Retrieved from http://tyndallreport.com/comment/20/5778/

candidates called each other names and commented on personal traits, the media picked up on those trivia and may have even exaggerated their relevance through coverage.

This apparent absence on part of the media to exercise restrain while distinguishing between what comprises newsworthiness and what is *yellow journalism* was significantly noticeable during the 2015-16 election season. It was almost as if the traditional media had embraced the non-traditional ways of the blogs, or, had they? Were there any influences exerted by one upon another? Was there a radical departure noticeable in the tone and substance of political reporting? And to what extent did the blogosphere contribute to a shift, if any? These questions bear relevance to the way future of journalism and new media can be envisaged.

To understand the role(s) of blogs and bloggers in influencing traditional media and journalists, it will be useful to analyze this widely and controversially reported phase of the election season as a case study. This study frames this pre-primary phase through certain dominant themes/issues as highlighted by the leading candidates; by analyzing the manner in which top political journalists and bloggers reproduced the events textually.

One year before the election, during two weeks of news starting November 27, 2015 - the beginnings of this era of tumultuous coverage - two breaking news stories of national importance broke simultaneously, focusing a broad public on the polarizing issues of gun rights, abortion, immigration, and Jihadist action against the U.S.-- first by covering gun violence targeting Planned Parenthood; then, in the following week, violent news drew media and public attention to a mass shooting in San Bernardino, CA, -- which later was declared as the deadliest terrorist attack to occur in the U.S.

since 9/11.

According to a report in the Los Angeles Times -

> This year, the Jalsa Salana Convention, usually joyous, had a somber undertone. A massacre had occurred a few weeks ago, just a short drive to the east, perpetrated by a husband and wife who, like many of them, had Pakistani surnames and a strong belief in Islam. The couple, Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik, killed 14 people and wounded 22 at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino on Dec. 2 in the worst terrorist attack on American soil since Sept. 11. Security has been stepped up at the mosque, a prominent landmark on Ramona Avenue. As a precaution, organizers canceled the conference's evening sessions.[3]

Almost as newsworthy as these separate conflicts was the political response to

them: Instead of scrutinizing the roots of gun violence and mass shootings, the leading

Republican candidate called for a complete ban on Muslims entering the United States.

According to a report by the Washington Post –

> A majority of Republicans support presidential candidate Donald Trump's call to temporarily block Muslims from entering the United States, even as a clear majority of the public overall rejects the idea in a new Washington Post-ABC News poll…
> Republicans endorse Trump's proposal by a margin of 59 percent to 38 percent, with significant appeal across large swaths of the GOP electorate. For Republicans and GOP-leaning independents, support for Trump's idea is especially strong among those who lack college degrees — a group that has been particularly supportive of Trump in general. Sixty-three percent of those respondents support Trump's plan, while it falls to 44 percent among college graduates.[4]

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[3] Chang, C. (2015, December 26). San Bernardino shootings cast a somber tone over Muslim conference in Chino. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-1227-islamic-convention-20151227-story.html

[4] Clement, S. (2015, December 14). Republicans embrace Trump's ban on Muslims while most others reject it. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/americans-reject-trumps-muslim-ban-but-

Donald Trump's sweeping and assured response drew massive reactions from inside and outside of the country. The polarization of U.S. citizens concerning roots of terror quickly started taking shape and solidifying, spurred by almost daily polling and publishing of public sentiment.[5] [6]

By the time the primary results started arriving on February 1, 2016, the stage for the primaries had adequately been set into camps reacting to recent events and choosing candidates in a climate of intensely divisive politics.

Unseen Players: New Media and a New Rhetorical Mix

It would be easy to blame one or two outspoken or flamboyant candidates—for the division and the storm of unprecedented charges and counter-charges, incendiary tweets, and claims about the lives and pasts of the major candidates. The unchecked rhetoric of Donald Trump knocked the press on their collective heels, resulting in poor-quality news coverage across all media.

But to assume that this new political climate was made possible solely by a stunned press reacting to one unorthodox campaigner would not comprise a credible or

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republicans-embrace-it/2015/12/14/24f1c1a0-a285-11e5-9c4e-be37f66848bb_story.html

[5] Peele, T. (2016, January 7). Terrorism poll: After San Bernardino attack, 71 percent of California voters believe another attack is likely. *The Mercury News.* Retrieved from http://www.mercurynews.com/2016/01/07/terrorism-poll-after-san-bernardino-attack-71-percent-of-california-voters-believe-another-attack-is-likely/

[6] Silver, N. (2016, March 22). Past terrorist attacks helped Trump capitalize on anti-Muslim sentiments. *Five Thirty Eight.* Retrieved from https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/past-terrorist-attacks-helped-trump-capitalize-on-anti-muslim-sentiment/

comprehensive analysis. Not only would such an approach be too narrow and conventional, it would also ignore other forces at work which served to enable and amplify rhetoric and venom that comprised the political order of the day from late November 2015 through the Spring primaries and the 2016 elections.

The present study is focused on the complex media mix of the 21st Century and how it shaped political media and gave unique characteristics (and possibly a unique outcome) to the 2016 election.

"Clash of Civilizations" and Rhetoric for the New Media Audience

Standing in contrast to the ongoing rhetoric of intolerance that came to characterize campaigns—Presidential and others-- in 2015-2016, was the fact that the United States, a country founded by immigrants, traditionally has embraced peoples of various countries and refugees, at least in public and official statements.

The collective experiences of minority communities within the U.S. have certainly not been as rosy as those of dominant social groups, who are usually white and upper-middle class; but for a major political party to endorse a candidate calling for a ban on entry of immigrants belonging to a certain race or religion was alarming, if not unprecedented.

Many Republican Presidential candidates in the primaries at that time declared in various ways that the United States was "at war", at times invoking the "Clash of Civilizations" sentiments. In a way, they were ideologically inclined towards what Samuel P. Huntington had theorized in the past.

According to Huntington (1993) –

Civilization identity will be increasingly important in the future, and the world will be shaped in large measure by the interactions among seven or eight major civilizations. These include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilization. The most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations from one another.

Why will this be the case?

First, differences among civilizations are not only real; they are basic. Civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion…

Even more than ethnicity, religion discriminates sharply and exclusively among people. A person can be half-French and half-Arab and simultaneously even a citizen of two countries. It is more difficult to be half-Catholic and half-Muslim…As people define their identity in ethnic and religious terms, they are likely to see an "us" versus "them" relation existing between themselves and people of different ethnicity or religion…Differences in culture and religion create differences over policy issues, ranging from human rights to immigration to trade and commerce to the environment.

The "Clash of Civilizations" essay in which Huntington singled out Islam as having "bloody borders" was a response to his former student Francis Fukuyama's book "The End of History and the Last Man" (1992). Fukuyama was an ideological backbone to Ronald Reagan's "Reagan Doctrine" and a pioneer in neoconservatism, whose theory was a strong repudiation of Marx, in that he argued that the ideological evolution had ended with the demise of cold war that necessitated the universalization of capitalism. In Fukuyama's words, "What we have called the "logic of modern natural science" is in effect an economic interpretation of historical change, but one which (unlike its Marxist variant) leads to capitalism rather than socialism as its final result."

In reviewing *End of History*, Michael Baur (1994) argues that Fukuyama posits, "The human mastery of nature that is made possible by natural science seems to lead inevitably to capitalism, which in turn seems to require liberal democracy as a

form of political organization."

Fukuyama's book not only prompted the *Clash of Civilizations* thesis, it also drew admiration from other prominent neoconservatives such as Dinesh D'Souza, who wrote in "What's so Great About America" (2002) -

> "In Fukuyama's view, history had ended, not in the sense that important things would cease to happen, but in the sense that the grand ideological conflicts of the past had been forever settled. Of course, the pace of liberalization would vary, but the outcome was inevitable. The destiny of Homo sapiens had been resolved. We are headed for what may be termed Planet America" (pp. 13-14).

Planet America as destination for the neocons seemed to have influenced the Republicans during the primaries. It was not a scholastic debate surrounding the remnants of ideology in various degrees invoking Mannheim (1936), Bell (1960), Gramsci (1971) or Hall (1986), but rather an enunciation that American exceptionalism dwelling within the Planet America was a logical culmination when grand ideologies wither away. D'Souza (2007) takes Huntington a step further towards the right when he argues that the enemies of America are annoyed with both the American exceptionalism and American universalism – as both are tied together.

> "America represents a new way of being human and thus presents a radical challenge to the world. On the one hand, Americans have throughout their history held that they are special: that their country has been blessed by God, that the American system is unique, that Americans are not like people everywhere else. This set of beliefs is called "American exceptionalism." At the same time, Americans have also traditionally insisted that they provide a model for the world, that theirs is a formula that others can follow, and that there is no better life available elsewhere. Paradoxically enough, American exceptionalism leads to American universalism" (pp. 1003-1013).

The challenges to the *Planet America* comprising exceptionalism and universalism are aplenty, especially in the Muslim world. As D'Souza (2002) writes,

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there are "people, especially in the Muslim world that apparently hate our guts and want to wipe us off the face us the earth" (p.14). Christine Kelly (2003) responds to D'Souza's arguments thus –

> Just as D'Souza loads our choices here, his entire argument is loaded with the pre-ordained conclusion that the world is unable to achieve higher standards for human organization than those found in the American state. That conclusion ultimately permits the current U.S. regime to impose and defends its interests however and wherever it sees fit.

Neocon rhetoric surrounding American exceptionalism has found credible space within the news media too, where for instance, a 'fair and balanced' view is achievable once the focus is on furthering of the conservative space.[7]

Against these backdrops and theoretical leanings of scholars who have endorsed and/or worked with the Republicans, it probably came as no surprise when on November 15, 2015, Republican presidential hopeful Sen. Marco Rubio (Fla.) offered his critique of Hillary Clinton's statement that she didn't believe the United States was at war with Islam, in the following words – "That would be like saying we weren't at war with Nazis, because we were afraid to offend some Germans who may have been members of the Nazi Party but weren't violent themselves."

Rubio alluded to Huntington and D'Souza when he continued with "This is a clash of civilizations.... There is no middle ground on this. Either they win or we win. And we need to begin to take this seriously. These are individuals motivated by their

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[7] Wilstein, M. (2014, August 7). Bill O'Reilly Accidentally Proves Fox News Isn't so 'Fair and Balanced'. Retrieved from
http://www.mediaite.com/tv/bill-oreilly-accidentally-proves-fox-news-is-not-fair-and-balanced/

faith."[8]

Three days after Paris suffered terrorist attack of November 13, 2015, French President François Hollande spoke before a joint session of Parliament in Versailles, where he categorically declared that, "It cannot be said that we are engaged in a war of civilizations, for these assassins do not represent one."[9] And yet, the Republican presidential candidates didn't lose any time before utilizing the event to fuel the possibility of a clash of civilizations.

Conservative blog Breitbart News quoted GOP candidate for President Ben Carson as saying, "we are currently facing a clash of civilizations" between radical Islam and western values. The headline read, "Ben Carson: The West is facing a 'Clash of Civilizations' with fundamentalist Islam". Likewise, in a radio interview with Hugh Hewitt, another presidential hopeful Jeb Bush said, "It's not a law-enforcement operation and the mindset in our country at least needs to change to recognize it for what it is. This is an organized effort to destroy Western civilization and we need to lead in this regard."[10]

[8] Tharoor, I. (2015, November 16). U.S. Republicans see a clash of civilizations. French president says no. The Washington Post. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/11/16/u-s-republicans-see-a-clash-of-civilizations-french-president-says-no/

[9] Hollande, F. (2015, November 16). *Speech by the President of the Republic before a joint session of Parliament.* Speech presented at Versailles. Retrieved from http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/defence-security/parisattacks-paris-terror-attacks-november-2015/article/speech-by-the-president-of-the-republic-before-a-joint-session-of-parliament

[10] Ford, M. (2015, November 14). How the 2016 Candidates Responded to the Paris Attacks. The Atlantic. Retrieved from http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/paris-2016-candidates-response/416046/

The clash of civilizations sentiments continued with another Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz who condemned any proposal to bring Muslim refugees while advocating for the acceptance of only the Christians from Syria. He said, "There is no meaningful risk of Christians committing acts of terror." The article by Amy Davidson in the *New Yorker* dated November 16, 2015[11] where Cruz was quoted also wondered –

> "This will come as a profound surprise to the people of Oklahoma City and Charleston, to all parties in Ireland, and to the families of the teen-agers whom Anders Breivik killed in Norway, among many others. The Washington Post noted that Cruz "did not say how he would determine that refugees were Christian or Muslim." Would he accept baptismal certificates, or notes from pastors? Does he just want to hear the refugees pray?"

Against this rhetoric of civilizational and cultural clashes, President Obama declared intolerance and said, "When I hear political leaders suggesting that there should be a religious test for admitting which person fleeing which country, when some of these folks themselves come from other countries, that's shameful. That's not America. That's not who we are. We don't have religious tests to our compassion."[12] However, Obama's plea failed and the House passed the Republicans' bill that would halt any acceptance of refugees from Syria. Even 47 Democrats joined the GOP in

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[11] Davidson, A. (2015, November 16). Ted Cruz's religious test for Syrian refugees. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from http://www.newyorker.com/news/amy-davidson/ted-cruzs-religious-test-for-syrian-refugees

[12] McCarthy, T. (2015, November 16). Obama savages Republican calls to give priority to Christian refugees from Syria. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/nov/16/obama-attacks-republican-calls-priority-christian-refugees-from-syria

voting for a xenophobic bill titled, "American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act"

within one week of the attack in Paris.

While laws were being enacted against perceived foreign enemies, back home

the domestic acts of violence were not exactly being called terrorism. Around the same

time when some media endorsed and expanded on the war-like rhetoric, others were

concerned over effects of subtle racism that could already have played a role in shaping

public perceptions by downplaying the religion of the attacker of Planned Parenthood

in the same month (November 2015). Robert Dear Jr., the suspect in the Planned

Parenthood attack in Colorado faced 179 counts of first-degree murder, attempted

murder and various other crimes, but media simply did not use the word "terror" as a

way to describe his act. Dear considered Paul Hill, "the murderous leader of an

antiabortion group" as his hero while President Obama was referred by him as the

"antichrist"[13], and still his ideology was not colored in the manner the attackers of San

Bernardino would be, the following week.

The New York Times reported this incident, for instance, without mentioning

potential acts of terrorism, on November 27, 2015 –

> A gun battle erupted inside a Planned Parenthood center here on Friday
> when a man armed with an assault-style rifle opened fire and began shooting at
> officers as they rushed to the scene. The authorities reported that three people
> were killed, a police officer and two civilians, and nine were wounded before
> the suspect finally surrendered more than five hours after the first shots were
> fired.
> A police official in Colorado Springs identified the man in custody as
> Robert Lewis Dear.
> The police did not describe the motives of the 57-year-old gunman. For

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[13] Barbash, F. & Wang, Y. (2016, April 16). The twisted 'dream' of accused Planned
Parenthood killer Robert Dear Jr. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/04/12/the-twisted-
remorselessness-of-accused-planned-parenthood-killer-robert-dear-jr/

hours on Friday, officers traded gunfire with him inside the clinic before they were able to shout to the man and persuade him to give up, according to Lt. Catherine Buckley, a police spokeswoman.[14]

In contrast to the attack on Planned Parenthood, media coverage of the motive behind shooting in San Bernardino a week later was contrasting – the word "terrorism" was in the headlines of many news reports. CNN's headline read, "San Bernardino shooting investigated as 'act of terrorism'"[15] Likewise, *Los Angeles Times* on its report on the attack the very next day quoted an officer who considered it as a potential act of terrorism. According to the report [16]–

> While federal sources have told The Times that Farook left the party after an altercation, investigators said Wednesday night that the motive for the mass shooting was unclear.
> "Is this a terrorist incident? We do not know," said David Bowdich, assistant director of the FBI's Los Angeles field office. He later said that terrorism had not been ruled out as a motive.

War on Women

The approach of many campaigners, which was reflected in the coverage of campaigns and accompanying editorial content, was waging a rhetorical war, not just on Muslims, but also on women. The sexist overtones employed by presidential

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[14] Turkewitz, J. & Healy, J. (2015, November 27). 3 Are Dead in Colorado Springs Shootout at Planned Parenthood Center. The New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/28/us/colorado-planned-parenthood-shooting.html

[15] Botelho, G. & Ellis, R. (2015, December 5). San Bernardino shooting investigated as 'act of terrorism'. CNN. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/04/us/san-bernardino-shooting/index.html

[16] Serrano, R., Esquivel, P. & Winton, R. (2015, December 2). Authorities identify couple who they believe killed 14 at San Bernardino holiday party. Los Angeles Times. Retrieved from http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-up-to-20-shot-in-san-bernardino-active-shooter-sought-20151202-story.html

candidates were quite noteworthy during the primaries. Donald Trump complained

about Megyn Kelly to CNN's Don Lemon, "You could see there was blood coming out

of her eyes. Blood coming out her wherever."[17] Megyn Kelly also irked another

presidential hopeful Marco Rubio when she asked him "You favor a rape and incest

exception to abortion bans. If you believe that life begins at conception, as you say you

do, how do you justify ending a life just because it begins violently, through no fault

of the baby?"[18] Hillary Clinton found Rubio's abortion stance "offensive and troubling"

and Rubio immediately shot back with a statement that was quoted in *The Huffington*

Post, as saying, that Clinton "holds radical views on abortion that we look forward to

exposing in the months to come."[19]

Ted Cruz was quoted by the media for calling Planned Parenthood a "criminal

enterprise", guilty of "multiple felonies."[20] He said on October 28, 2015: "When

millions of Americans rose up against Planned Parenthood, I was proud to lead that

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[17] Yan, H. (2015, August 8). Donald Trump's 'blood' comment about Megyn Kelly draws outrage. *CNN*. Retrieved from
http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/08/politics/donald-trump-cnn-megyn-kelly-comment/
[18] Lachman, S. (2015, August 7). Marco Rubio Claims He Doesn't Support The Abortion Exceptions He Backed 2 Years Ago. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/marco-rubio-says-he-doesnt-support-abortion-exceptions-he-backed-2-years-ago_us_55c40397e4b0923c12bc5f8c
[19] Lachman, S. (2015, August 10). Hillary Clinton: Marco Rubio's Abortion Stance Is 'Offensive And Troubling'. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/hillary-clinton-marco-rubio-abortion_us_55c8ff61e4b0f73b20ba441c
[20] Davidson, A. (2015, November 29). The Planned Parenthood shooting and the Republican candidates' responses. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from http://www.newyorker.com/news/amy-davidson/the-planned-parenthood-shooting-and-the-republican-candidates-responses

fight."[21] Likewise, Carly Fiorina, another Republican presidential hopeful, attacked reproductive rights of women on November 29, 2015 in an interview, "The vast majority of Americans agree, what Planned Parenthood is doing is wrong. That's why the vast majority of Americans are prepared not only to defund Planned Parenthood, but also to stop abortion for any reason at all after five months."[22]

Both "wars" got amply covered by the media during these crucial early months of the campaign year, possibly setting the stage for the unlikely events of November 2016 and for the earlier delegate counts, state by state, and primary results that seemed counter to public perceptions and expectations.

These wars and their outcomes in terms of votes are particularly remarkable considering the full context of the 2015-16 Presidential race: For the first time in U.S. history, a woman candidate, Democrat Hillary Clinton, was the standard bearer for one of the two major political parties, portending a historic moment in November for women's rights movements and feminism.

Hillary Clinton quite possibly became the first Presidential candidate to actually use the word "feminist" in her first address on women uplift. She said, "It is hard to believe that in 2015 so many women still pay a price for being mothers. It is also hard to believe that so many women are also paid less than many for the same work, with

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[21] Transcript: Republican Presidential Debate (2015, October 28). *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/29/us/politics/transcript-republican-presidential-debate.html

[22] Lee, M. (2015, December 15). Carly Fiorina's exaggerated claims about Americans' views on Planned Parenthood and the 20-week abortion ban. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2015/12/15/carly-fiorinas-exaggerated-claims-about-americans-views-on-planned-parenthood-and-20-week-abortion-ban/

even wider gaps for women of color. And if you don't believe what I say, look to the

World Economic Forum, hardly a hotbed of feminist thought. Their rankings show that

the United States is 65th out of 142 nations and other territories on equal pay."[23]

Hillary Clinton's feminism however was interrogated variously. An exploratory

essay citing a young feminist Alexandra Svokos, in *The Atlantic* titled, "What young

feminists think of Hillary Clinton" read-

> "Feminism came to mean something very different from girl power.
> And Hillary Clinton came to look like the symbol of an older generation of
> women more concerned with female empowerment—in particular, with white,
> middle-class, American female empowerment—than with broader issues of
> social and economic justice. Svokos says she'll vote for Clinton in 2016, but
> she's not expecting her to make social justice and inequality true priorities if she
> makes it to the White House."[24]

From a leftist perspective, Jacobian made a categorical observation by equating

Hillary Clinton's championing of women's rights as a form of corporate feminism. It

questioned Clinton's feminism based on her allegiance to global capital. According to

the authors Young and Becerra (2015)[25] –

> All issues of wealth, power, and violence are also women's and LGBT
> rights issues. For instance, neoliberal economic policies of austerity and
> privatization disproportionately hurt women and LGBT individuals, who are
> often the lowest paid and the first workers to be fired, the most likely to bear
> the burdens of family maintenance, and the most affected by the involuntary

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[23] Marcotte, A. (2015, April 24). Clinton's first campaign speech is all about
feminism. *Slate*. Retrieved from
http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2015/04/24/hillary_clinton_s_first_campaign_s
peech_it_s_all_about_feminism.html
[24] Mirhashem, M. (2015, May 15). What young feminists think of Hillary Clinton.
The Atlantic. Retrieved from
http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/05/what-young-feminists-think-of-
hillary-clinton/440064/
[25] Young, K. & Becerra, D. (2015, March 9). Hillary Clinton's Empowerment.
Jacobian. Retrieved from https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/03/hillary-clinton-
womens-rights-feminism/

migration, domestic violence, homelessness, and mental illness that are intensified by poverty.

Clinton's record on such issues is hardly encouraging. Her decades of service on corporate boards and in major policy roles as first lady, senator, and secretary of state give a clear indication of where she stands.

Regardless of the broad spectrum of analysis concerning feministic standpoints of candidates, or their lack thereof; as the campaigns of both Republicans and Democrats evolved, what became peculiarly disconcerting was the tracking of the disparaging media coverage of all major players who were women - from Hillary Clinton and Carly Fiorino to others on the margins of the election, such as the wives of both Ted Cruz and Donald Trump.

Language employed by politicians and the media alike to discredit and disrespect Hillary Clinton, a former Senator, a Secretary of State and also, a former First Lady, were of note. Vilification by the Trump campaign, amplified and repeated by media, did not stop at labeling Hillary Clinton as a "liar", but went on to criticize Hillary Clinton for tolerating her cheating spouse during Bill Clinton's sex scandal episode, bringing to bear on her one of the oldest women stereotypes, the weak woman whose weakness makes her accountable for the bad behavior of her spouse, a specialized case of *blaming the victim*.

The ongoing sexist coverage and language employed by politicians and the media alike, were notable and even shocking. The wife-measuring contest went on to become a media fodder as Melania Trump's magazine spread was circulated and republished by blogs and traditional media alike as a way to compare her with Heidi Cruz, the wife of Ted Cruz. Whereas Trump tweeted: "Lyin' Ted Cruz just used a

picture of Melania from a G.Q. shoot in his ad. Be careful, Lyin' Ted, or I will spill the

beans on your wife!", Ted Cruz shot back with "Pic of your wife not from us. Donald,

if you try to attack Heidi, you're more of a coward than I thought. #classless".

One article[26] in Alternet on March 23, 2016 concluded that "Trump's attack on

Cruz's wife proves he's too sexist to stand a chance against Clinton". It read –

> Most news sources are assuming that Trump was referring to Heidi Cruz's history of struggling with depression, and if so, then congratulations, Trump. You did the impossible: You made Ted Cruz, by far the creepiest politician on the national stage since Ross Perot, seem like a decent man who cares for and stands by his wife.
> That sort of thing doesn't just impact female voters, but a lot of men, as well. Even some men who might have some sympathy for Trump's leering sexism are going to draw the line at treating a beloved wife like she's a defective product who needs to be returned to the factory just because she has some health problems. Most men's marriages are more like the Cruz marriage than the Trump marriage. They aren't going to be keen on the idea that Trump would look down on them for that.
> Six out of 10 female voters think Trump is an embarrassment, but it's also true that 4 out of 10 male voters think that.

Vox reported that Ted Cruz was not responsible for the ad which depicted

Melania from a magazine shoot. Calling it a tactic to slut-shame Melania Trump, the

author Emily Crockett quoted Barbara Walters saying, "Maybe because she's so

beautiful, we don't expect her to be as smart as she is." Crockett wrote[27]:

> But people who see this ad might not know any of that, and might be inclined to judge Melania Trump negatively because of how she's portrayed. The ad plays on unfortunate stereotypes about women who pose nude or are open about their sexuality: that they're vapid, can't be trusted, and shouldn't be respected. It attacks Trump not by attacking him directly, but by impugning the

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[26] Marcotte A. (2016, March 23). Trump's attack on Cruz's wife proves he's too sexist to stand a chance against Clinton. *Alternet.* Retrieved from http://www.alternet.org/election-2016/trumps-female-problems-donald-trumps-attack-ted-cruzs-wife-proves-hes-too-sexist-stand

[27] Crockett, E. (2016, March 22). New ad attacks Trump by slut-shaming his wife. *Vox*. Retrieved from http://www.vox.com/2016/3/21/11279018/melania-trump-slut-shaming-ad

character of the woman he decided to marry.

Disrespectful references in media coverage also extended to the description of Donald Trump's wife as an "illegal," a prelude to later attacks on Melania Trump for her nude modeling prior to her marriage. *The Daily Beast* carried a report headlined "A Model First Lady: The Immigrant who sleeps next to Trump."[28] A story on *National Review* had a judgment for a headline: "Deport Melania Trump". Its author Kevin Williamson described Melania Trump as "literally the poster girl for his (Trump's) corrupt, H-1B-exploiting agency." Making a remark on Trump's "sexual insecurities", the article goes on to say that "Being married to Donald Trump is, as it turns out, another temporary job Americans just won't do."[29]

When Quotes go Low

The proliferation of such casual, gossipy criticism, as well of accompanying slang, profanities and cursing in media coverage of the 2015-16 elections was notable and even staggering to reporters and readers who had more than 10-15 years of experience in consuming journalism about elections.

It of course drew ire of President Obama who was quoted in New York Times[30]

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[28] Murphy, P. (2015, September 1). The immigrant who sleeps next to Trump. *The Daily Beast*. Retrieved from http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/09/01/the-immigrant-who-sleeps-next-to-trump.html

[29] Williamson, K. (2016, March 11). Deport Melania Trump. *The National Review*. Retrieved from http://www.nationalreview.com/article/432679/donald-trumps-immigrant-wife-his-visa-exploiting-modeling-agency

[30] Davis, J. (2016, September 18). Obama Asks for Reality Check as 'Frivolous' Issues Dominate Election. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/19/us/politics/election-noise-and-frivolous-issues-hinder-obamas-last-objectives.html

as saying -

> "Donald Trump says stuff every day that used to be considered as disqualifying for being president. And yet, because he says it over and over and over again, the press just gives up and they just say, 'Well, yeah, you know — O.K.' They just stop. So, the bottom line is that we cannot afford suddenly to treat this like a reality show."

The level of disinterest at best, and disgust at worst, among the readers of such published reports reflected in the unprecedented unpopularity of leading presidential candidates. As a report in *The Intercept* discussed[31] –

> Americans overall don't like Trump or Clinton. In polls taken over the past six weeks, Trump's average net favorable/unfavorable rating has been minus 23 percent, and Clinton's has been minus 12 percent.
> However, beneath the surface, it's the high level of distaste for both of them among the opposite gender that is driving those awful ratings.
> Women dislike Trump with what's likely a historically unique intensity for a national politician. Trump's average net favorability among women over the past six weeks is minus 33 percent — far worse than the minus 2 percent net favorability among women for Marco Rubio or the minus 14 percent for Ted Cruz. Likewise, in a poll taken just before the 2012 election, Mitt Romney had a net favorability among women of minus 2 percent.

Insults in quotes and other parts of coverage were not limited to sexist and Xenophobic references alone. Also present was the repeated reference in the media to Hitler in depicting both Trump and Clinton.

One notable commentary in *Poynter* dwelled upon the danger of laughing at Donald Trump because the authors claimed it was a "big mistake" to demote Trump to

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[31] Schwarz, J. (2016, March 21). Women Hate Donald Trump Even More Than Men Hate Hillary Clinton. *The Intercept*. Retrieved from https://theintercept.com/2016/03/21/women-hate-donald-trump-even-more-than-men-hate-hillary-clinton/

the entertainment page. According to Caplan and McBride (2015)[32] -

> We certainly have a more robust political system than 1930s Germany. But Trump's racist rhetoric should be viewed in the repugnant tradition of Hitler…. Comedians can and should play Trump for laughs. But serious news organizations will help the audience see that Trump isn't just amusing, he's dangerous.

Likewise, *Philadelphia Daily News* on its December 8, 2015 issue ran the cover with a photo of Trump with his arm raised to look like a Nazi salute.[33] *The Washington Post* also published a story on November 23, 2015 headlined, "Donald Trump's rally carries echoes of Hitler's rise to power."[34]

At the same time, there were objections from some media concerning such potentially ahistorical comparisons. Matthew Rozsa writing for *MSNBC*[35] pointed out the qualities to Trump's campaign that invoked parallels to Nazism, but cautioned against overt comparison. He wrote –

> (In short), by comparing Trump's presidential campaign to distinctly foreign, extreme right-wing ideologies, we overlook the homegrown antecedents from which he has drawn. Consequently, we deny ourselves one of the chief tools necessary for effectively combatting him – namely, historical perspective….
> That's why we must resist the urge to characterize Trump's racial

[32] Caplan, A. & McBride, K. (2015, July 20). Commentary: The danger of laughing at Donald Trump. *Poynter.* Retrieved from http://www.poynter.org/2015/commentary-the-danger-of-laughing-at-donald-trump/358895/

[33] Campbell, C. (2015, December 8). Philadelphia newspaper compares Donald Trump to Hitler. *Business Insider.* Retrieved from http://www.businessinsider.com/philadelphia-daily-news-cover-donald-trump-hitler-2015-12

[34] King, C. (2015, November 23). Donald Trump's rally carries echoes of Hitler's rise to power. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2015/11/23/donald-trumps-rally-carries-echoes-of-hitlers-rise-to-power/

[35] Rozsa, M. (2015, November 30). Opinion: The problem with comparing Trump to Hitler. *MSNBC.* Retrieved from http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/donald-trump-not-adolf-hitler

demagoguery, cult of personality, and authoritarian policy proposals as fascist or in any other way Hitleresque. By doing this, we deny and potentially empower the brutality, oppression, and violence that has marked so much of America's political history. Trump is certainly pandering to our nation's worst instincts, but the sentiments into which he has tapped have been with this country for a long, long time.

The Hitler comparison was also made by inference. Even while Hillary Clinton did not explicitly compare Trump to Hitler, journalists condemned her for attempting to do so and some media covered those stories. As an example, the Washington Post ran a blog piece by Marc Thiessen which was headlined sensationally, "Sorry, Hillary Clinton. Donald Trump is no Nazi."[36]

Trump wasn't the only candidate compared to Hitler. Hillary Clinton was not spared by extensive media coverage which similarly depicted her. Especially prominent was Ted Nugent's comparison of Hillary Clinton to Hitler based on fake quotes. [37] A meme titled "Hillary Hitler"[38] was widely circulated that carried photos of Hitler and Hillary Clinton with quotes attributed to them, where Hitler says "Society's needs come before the individual needs", and Clinton says "We must stop thinking of the individual and start thinking about what is best for society."

The bias of ableism was also starkly evident across media coverage. Ableism is

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[36] Thiessen, M. (2015, August 31). Sorry, Hillary Clinton. Donald Trump is no Nazi. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/sorry-hillary-clinton-donald-trump-is-no-nazi/2015/08/31/2cee0bda-4fdc-11e5-8c19-0b6825aa4a3a_story.html

[37] Tashman, B. (2016, February 23). Ted Nugent Compares Hillary Clinton To Hitler Based On Fake Quotes. *Right Wing Watch.* Retrieved from http://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/ted-nugent-compares-hillary-clinton-to-hitler-based-on-fake-quotes/

[38] Hillary Hitler. *The Burning Platform.* Retrieved from https://www.theburningplatform.com/2015/05/28/hillary-hitler/

defined by autistic and disability justice activist Lydia Brown as an "oppression, prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination against disabled people on the basis of actual or presumed disability", and "the belief that people are superior or inferior, have better quality of life, or have lives more valuable or worth living on the basis of actual or perceived disability."[39]

From Hillary Clinton being described as "hysteric"[40] to Donald Trump being "insane,"[41] personal ableist-flavored attacks continued to receive unbridled coverage in media of the 2015-16 campaigns. It is difficult to say whether repeated media coverages of hearsay, ubiquitous name-calling, and half-truths prior to the Presidential primaries came to constitute a form of "propaganda" or "yellow journalism." But it is clear in retrospect that this type of coverage could have contributed cynicism and pettiness to an American ritual and—at the same time-- may have had consequences on what turned out to be a close election.

Focus of the Present Research

Questions about how the media images in general may have been tarnished in recent political processes and subsequent coverages, as well as questions about how to

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[39] Brown, L. (2016). Definitions. *Autistic Hoya*. Retrieved from http://www.autistichoya.com/p/definitions.html

[40] Pavlich, K. (2015, November 10). Hahaha: Hillary Clinton laughs hysterically when male audience member says he wants to "strangle Carly Fiorina". *Town Hall*. Retrieved from http://townhall.com/tipsheet/katiepavlich/2015/11/10/hillary-clinton-laughs-hysterically-when-male-audience-member-says-he-want-to-strangle-carly-fiorina-n2078661

[41] Easley, J. (2015, June 16). In an insane rant Donald Trump announces his should be President because he's really rich. Politics USA. Retrieved from http://www.politicususa.com/2015/06/16/insane-rant-donald-trump-announces-president-rich.html

restore integrity of the media—lie beyond the scope of most researchers to investigate. But what constantly held this researcher's attention for most of the recent elections and piqued my curiosity, inquisitiveness and interest to probe, was the process through which the reportage of political events was undergoing a number of changes, and why.

Social Locations of the Researcher

This dissertation research stems from my personal interests and ongoing professional experiences during this tumultuous time for both journalism and democracy.

As a staff writer covering political stories for more than a decade, and as a blogger myself for almost as long, I was drawn to the goal of better understanding the flow of political news that was apparent in the 2016 Presidential elections. Could new forces be revealed through analysis of the coverages, I asked?

In 2006, I started on a research project examining why journalists blog. In that research, I collected interviews and survey responses, as I explored blogging as a journalistic medium, specifically when I was locating the journalist as a blogger.

Around that time, bloggers were trying to gain wider acceptance within the traditional media spaces. On March 7, 2005, Garrett M. Graff, as the editor of *Fishbowl DC* (published by Mediabistro.com) became the first blogger to be granted a daily White House pass for the specific purpose of writing a blog[42]. I had the opportunity to attend the first conference of the bloggers at the National Press Club in Washington

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[42] Seelye, K. (2005, March 7). Media; White House approves pass for blogger. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/07/washington/media-white-house-approves-pass-for-blogger.html

D.C. on April 8, 2005. Analyzing the relationship between the work of career journalists and their blogs, I tried to identify various needs of journalists which draw them towards blogging.

It became increasingly obvious as my research progressed, that blogging was a distinct genre – a form and force in journalism that is fundamentally distinct in its function for the journalists and for their publications. That realization inspired the present dissertation for a number of reasons.

Rationale for the research

Newsroom values are often guided by well-established principles of journalism (Kovach, Rosenstiel, 2007). Even as absolute objectivity is acknowledged as being impossible to attain in most cases, the attempts of journalists as professional purveyors of truth have often distinguished them. The clarity of purpose, lucidity in writing, judiciousness in deciding newsworthiness, and other characteristics are among many traits that exemplify American journalists. To maintain this high standard, news publications usually adhere to style sheets and maintain absolutes when it comes to usage of slurs and profanities. Most reputable journalists generally strive to treat serious issues with sincerity, take pride in good investigative reporting, and they exercise care when framing a lead paragraph or a headline. Media ethics strongly disavow plagiarism and encourage correct terms so the reporting does not offend marginalized populations of society. Lest controversial opinions are treated as emanating from the media, such opinions are explicitly marked as not reflecting editorial views, for the sake of discerning readers.

Question of Objectivity

Of course, blogs have traditionally enjoyed immunity from the objectivity jury. Blogs do not, by definition, claim to be impartial and they do not have an obligation to be presented in a certain way other than how they target specific audience. So, whether moveon.org expressed Democratic sentiments or breitbart.com expressed Republican opinion, matters little in this context. What creates a ripple, however, is when the traditional media that claim journalistic principles begin to emulate the more biased blogosphere.

One of the prominent ways to detect the intersection between the blogosphere and traditional media is the increase in the number of journalists who are writing blogs. Exploring whether there is a significant difference in their approach to both news reporting and blogging also forms a part of this research.

Overarching Questions for this study

The overarching questions that guide this dissertation include: How do journalists' blogs affect their reporting, and vice versa. I found my primary interest in dissertation research was to gather data that would allow investigation of this larger question and to address other specific research questions, including the following:

Has there been a shift in the language and overall discourse of political news reporting over the last few years? How have political blogs that are now daily reading for millions of Americans contributed to shifts in the processes, norms and products of traditional journalism?

As an experienced writer who has published in print media and blogs, I ask the

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following of my own work and that of the others: How does the intersection between blogs and traditional journalism provide valuable clues at an empirical level?

Finally, as an immigrant to this country, from India with the world's largest democracy which incidentally also has recently elected a right-wing government, I am intrigued by the potential repercussions of media narratives in the world's oldest democracy: How do new media, in the form of blogs, influence traditional political reporting in the U.S., or perhaps, even influence our electoral results?

Also critical to my undertaking is the question: What are the effects of journalists and bloggers increasingly including (as quotes, but nonetheless using as enhancements) the statements of divisive politicians, as well as their potentially inflammatory words and concepts (such as bias and negative stereotypes) in their writings?

Who in the blogosphere might be "fanning the flames", elongating the drama, and how? Is this emanating more from the political journalists or from the political bloggers?

Or is the work of the blogger simply grist for the mill of public opinion; an influence that is transmitted by the inflamed audience, through online comments and discussion?

Are the writings of journalists, bloggers, and comments from the audiences distinctly different? Is the mainstream press - in the quest to gain attention of an interactive audience - also willing to abandon the sanctities and rigors traditionally attached to its style sheets and inverted pyramid of facts?

The preceding questions are broad and daunting, but they demand the answers

that come through new research-- because of the knowledge gaps that currently exist

in analyzing the relationship between blogs and journalistic contents.

Chapter 2: Context for the Present Study

Prior to the 2015 U.S. Presidential primaries, claims and counter-claims flew: including the acknowledgement that the ship of the United States was sinking and that the candidate was needed to rescue her to "Make America Great Again." From here, charges turned to the denunciations of the top four presidential candidates as fascist, communist, liar, and robotic. The political climate surrounding the 2016 presidential elections not only seemed vitiated with negative campaigns, but more importantly appeared to be reveling in those.

The widespread participation in sloganeering, accusations, and often, just plain trolling-- by the mass media and their audiences alike -- may help explain why the candidates did not feel they needed to answer to critical questions at traditional press conferences. Instead, some candidates often spoke informally to the audience, roused their populist sentiments, cheered them on with politically incorrect statements and felt at home with the media covering those events. Also interesting during the 2015-16 electoral year was how the political journalists themselves were outweighing the presidential candidates in employing profanities, using judgmental tones and making emotive predictions – as the following section will substantiate.

How did readers, journalists themselves, and myriad fragmented audiences experience this peculiar media soup? The following "Prelude" seeks to refresh memories of this rather strange campaign season, with the highlights from the primaries season of 2015-16 through the elections and its aftermath, amidst events, publications, and people that will become empirically important in the study of the blogosphere and its relationship to traditional journalism.

On July 17, 2015, Newsweek reproduced a blog article titled "Is Donald Trump a Fascist"[43] that might have set the tone for the future writings on this subject. Ironical, because the print version of Newsweek magazine had just been revived a year prior to this, and despite having an 80-year old stellar performance as a leading publication, Newsweek decided to rely on a blog called "Anything Peaceful" to circulate an article whose opening lines were:

> "Just a few weeks ago, Donald Trump was a crank and joke, living proof that making lots of money doesn't mean you have the answers and further proof that being a capitalist doesn't mean you necessarily like or understand capitalism. His dabbling in politics was widely regarded as a silly distraction.
>
> This week, he leads the polls among the pack of Republican aspirants to the office of president of the United States. While all the other candidates are following the rules, playing the media, saying the right things, obeying the civic conventions, Trump is taking the opposite approach. He doesn't care. He says whatever. Thousands gather at his rallies to thrill to the moment.
>
> Suddenly he is serious, if only for a time, and hence it is time to take his political worldview seriously:
>
> I just heard Trump speak live. The speech lasted an hour, and my jaw was on the floor most of the time. I've never before witnessed such a brazen display of nativistic jingoism, along with a complete disregard for economic reality. It was an awesome experience, a perfect repudiation of all good sense and intellectual sobriety.
>
> Yes, he is against the establishment, against existing conventions. It also serves as an important reminder: As bad as the status quo is, things could be worse. Trump is dedicated to taking us there."

The liberal use of informal words in the opening paragraph, character assessment of the subject, open admission about the media being "played", first person

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[43] Tucker, J. (2015, July 17). Is Donald Trump a Fascist? *Newsweek.* Retrieved from http://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-fascist-354690

experiential narrative, overtly judgmental tone, and finally being prophetic about the capacity of an individual candidate to alter the status quo for the worse in future times - all these abundantly violate the basic premises upon which norms and ethics of journalism have traditionally stood. Nonetheless, these prominently comprise the characteristics of blogs as new medium of political communication. And increasingly, publications like Newsweek and other prestigious traditional media were being seen embracing such writings either through hiring bloggers, or by allowing their journalists to employ blogging etiquettes during the election season.

About four months after the *Newsweek* piece, *Slate* published an essay on November 25, 2015, headlined, "Donald Trump is a Fascist"[44] as an answer. On the same day, *CNN* carried the headline "Why some conservatives say Trump talk is fascist"[45]. *NY Mag* asked the question "Is Donald Trump a fascist?"[46] on the same day too. One week after that, *The New York Times* carried a headline on its opinion page, "Is Donald Trump a Fascist?"[47] and *CNN* posed the same question as its headline on December 9, 2015[48]. *The Atlantic* carried a story "I Know Fascists; Donald Trump is

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[44] Bouie, J. (2015, November 15). Donald Trump is a Fascist. *Slate.* Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2015/11/donald_trump_is_a_fascist_it_is_the_political_label_that_best_describes.html

[45] Lee, M.J. (2015, November 25). Why some conservatives say Trump talk is Fascist? *CNN.* Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/24/politics/donald-trump-fascism/

[46] Levitz, E. (2015, November 25). Is Donald Trump a Fascist? *New York.* Retrieved from http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2015/11/donald-trump-a-fascist.html

[47] Douthat, R. (2015, December 3). Is Donald Trump a Fascist? *The New York Times.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/03/opinion/campaign-stops/is-donald-trump-a-fascist.html

[48] Bergen, P. (2015, December 9). Is Donald Trump a Fascist? *CNN.* Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/09/opinions/bergen-is-trump-fascist/

no Fascist"[49] on January 16, 2016, by letting an Italian professor invalidate the fear. Following that, on February 10, 2016, *Slate* published an interview with an expert on the history of Fascism, headlined it "Is Donald Trump a Fascist?" and offered the answer underneath it: "Yes and no".[50]

In the *Slate* interview, Isaac Chotiner, a contributor, interviewed Robert Paxton, an authority on the history of fascism. He asked Paxton: "I'm obviously not comparing Trump to Hitler as a person, but watching the "moderate" Republicans tear each other apart over the last few weeks and then split the vote five ways in New Hampshire last night, I thought of the 1932 election in Germany, with everyone kind of thinking, depending on their interests, that there were bigger threats than Hitler and not focusing on him until it was too late."

If Trump coverages pulled the audience towards the harrowing past of Fascism in Europe, stories about Sanders warned the readers of communistic uprisings in the wake of the Democrat's rise in popularity. Around the same time, Donald Trump was called a fascist in the blogosphere, Sanders was called a Communist. On July 15, 2015, *Frontpagemag.com* carried a story headlined, "Bernie Sanders is a communist and an ignoramus."[51] *New York Post* revisited the topic on January 16, 2016, with a headline

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[49] Riotta G. (2016, January 16). I know Fascists; Donald Trump is no Fascist. *The Atlantic.* Retrieved from
https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/01/donald-trump-fascist/424449/

[50] Chotiner, I. (2016, February 10). Is Donald Trump a Fascist? *Slate.* Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/interrogation/2016/02/is_donald_trump_a_fascist_an_expert_on_fascism_weighs_in.html

[51] Vadum, M. (2015, July 15). Bernie Sanders is a communist and an ignoramus. *Frontpage Mag.* Retrieved from http://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/259477/bernie-sanders-communist-and-ignoramus-matthew-vadum

to describe Bernie Sanders - "Don't be fooled by Bernie Sanders — he's a diehard communist"[52]. The article read:

> Mainstreaming Sanders requires whitewashing his radical pro-communist past. It won't be easy to do.
> If Sanders were vying for a Cabinet post, he'd never pass an FBI background check. There'd be too many subversive red flags popping up in his file. He was a communist collaborator during the height of the Cold War.

Following the NY Post article, on January 18, 2016, *PJMedia* ran a blog post headlined, "No, 'New York Post': Bernie Sanders Is Not a Communist"[53] with 247 comments from readers weighing in with their takes. *WND* likewise published a blog entry headlined "Is Bernie Sanders a communist?"[54] on January 25, 2016 to emphatically claim that Sanders could be a little more sophisticated than Stalin, but he indeed was both a communist and a maniac. Over 400 readers commented on this article.

In the aftermath of the primaries too, the trend continued. Similarly, provocative articles - mostly misogynistic - were highlighted in the blogosphere about Hillary Clinton - where she was depicted as a "liar", a "dino", and a "phony". The *American Thinker* blog on January 26, 2016 ran an entry headlined, "Is Hillary Clinton a compulsive liar?"[55] On February 2, 2016, *Politico* ran a story whose headline addressed

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[52] Sperry, P. (2016, January 16). Don't be fooled by Bernie Sanders – he's a diehard communist. *New York Post.* Retrieved from http://nypost.com/2016/01/16/dont-be-fooled-by-bernie-sanders-hes-a-diehard-communist/

[53] Radosh, R. (2016, January 18). No, 'New York Post': Bernie Sanders is not a communist. *PJ Media.* Retrieved from https://pjmedia.com/ronradosh/2016/01/18/no-new-york-post-bernie-sanders-is-not-a-communist/

[54] Farah, J. (2016, January 25). Is Bernie Sanders a communist? *WND.* Retrieved from http://www.wnd.com/2016/01/is-bernie-sanders-a-communist/

[55] Joondeph, B. C. (2016, January 26). Is Hillary Clinton a compulsive liar? American Thinker. Retrieved from

the candidate by her first name: "Hillary's 'She's a Liar' Problem"[56]. *Polizette* blog

went to the extent of using the headline "Liar, Liar Pantsuit on Fire"[57] to portray Hillary

Clinton in a poor light. The article read,

> "The controversy-plagued Democratic candidate lies to Americans about lying. Hillary Clinton, who is viewed as dishonest and untrustworthy by more than half of Americans, believes she has never lied to the American people. She claims she has always "tried to" tell the truth."

Likewise, *National Review* ran a blog post headlined "Habitual Liar Lies

Habitually"[58], whose opening paragraph read,

> "The proposition that Hillary Rodham Clinton is a committed liar hardly need be litigated in the fact-check columns. It is as plain as her surname. It is practically syllogistic: All Clintons are liars, Herself is a Clinton, ergo . . ."

Huffpost Politics blog on February 10, 2016, ran an article "Four Reasons Why

Hillary Is a Democrat in Name Only"[59] where the blogger starts the essay with "For

the life of me, I can't fathom why anyone would consider voting for Hillary Clinton."

This is a direct allusion to the term "Dino" which has come to mean "Democrat in

Name Only". At the more literal level, there were blog posts with images of the Raptor

from Jurassic Park in an effort to make an image of Hillary Clinton resemble it.

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http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2016/01/is_hillary_clinton_a_compulsive_liar.html

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Huffington Post also legitimized the term "Dino" in a blog post on January 11, 2016, by depicting Hillary Clinton as a dinosaur, while attributing the sentiment to "Bernie Sanders supporters"[60].

Not very different were the media attacks on Ted Cruz. A popular blog *Wonkette.com* ran a story on September 29, 2015 that had the following headline: "Ted Cruz Has No Friends And Everybody Hates Him, LOL."[61] A blog, *Robot Butt* identified Cruz as someone whose "smile would tear his face apart" and "the world's first 3D-printed man"[62]. A blog, *Consequence of Sound* on February 8, 2016 headlined an entry as "Ted Cruz unable to answer question about his favorite band, because he's a human robot"[63]. Likewise, *Salon* ran a blog post on February 6, 2016, that validated the use of "robot" to describe the Republican candidate: "Patton Oswalt leads Twitter's savaging of robotic, repetitive Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio for debate performances".[64]

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Upon initial examinations of widely circulating political blogs prior to the primaries, a few questions cropped up: First, as noted in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, it seemed apparent from my own professional experience as a writer for daily newspapers, that there indeed was a qualitative change in the election coverage toward informality of language and a lapse in evidence—a change that has continued and is noticeable in journalism today. The question is whether this trend to a more informal style had its origins in the influences from the blogosphere.

Second, it appeared that there emerged during the campaign an online and in-print "embarrassment of riches", a not-so-journalistic pool of political analysis that did not necessarily dwell on (or, value) fact-checks.

Embarrassment of riches (Lowery & DeFleur, 1983) is used here to refer to the abundance of bloggers who frequently make prophetic gestures without validation, similar to the way ancient philosophers and prophets made predictions about many aspects of life without scientific support. Habermas (1989) refers to this development as the "colonization of the life world".

As Dahlgren (2012) writes, "Scientific experts in the media address many areas of life—for example, economics, or even love relationships and child raising—and offer guidance that makes use of discourses that often bypass reflection on values and politics. In the context of an evolution of this kind, the traditional normative discursive terrain of public intellectuals appears to be shrinking in many quarters."

Third, I wondered if the political journalists were using these "riches" in clever ways, lapsing into quick justifications of their own opinionated positions by

increasingly relying upon and attributing to blogs and their readers' comments.

Finally, I noticed that the use of political blogs by traditional journalists seemed to be shaping and stabilizing meanings through creation and adoption of new terminology and descriptive language; but to what extent this exchange of materials between blogs and journalists was succeeding in changing the current political discourse—this is a question that thus far has no clear answer. This dissertation will explicate this exchange of "riches" and its possible consequences.

In this chapter, I organize my many research questions, and discuss them in the context of previous research and theory (as well as to the timeline of the 2015-16 elections) that might help provide the answers. Through explicating the media of this period in their political and theoretical context, I hope that this dissertation research will provide improved understanding of changes in coverages and in news and political behaviors that – out of context – appear to be aberrant and bewildering.

I have a few comprehensive questions as well as specific research questions. My first big question is linked to the ongoing debates in communication research:

In their literal reading, how qualitatively different are political blogs from traditional press?

Here, the literal reading begs an explanation. Jennifer Mason (2002) suggests three different ways to read data: literally, interpretively and reflexively. If a researcher intends to read the data (in my case, a news article or a blog post) in their literal form, content, structure, style, layout, and so on, fall within the ambit of literal reading. It investigates 'what is there'. However, for the purpose of communication research,

inasmuch as a purely objective approach to social realities is not possible, a purely literal reading of the data is hardly attainable. Although data can speak for themselves, they are often of little interest to a communication researcher unless those data can be translated into conceptual terms (Chaffee, 1991). This translation is carried out diligently through intervention on part of the researcher who is aware of the limitations - of self, and of the tables of content. Besides, conceptualization cannot take place simply by laying down the data - it requires systematic analysis, a "formal system for doing something that we all do informally rather frequently, drawing conclusions from observations of content" (Stempel, 1981).

This formal system is what links commonplace perceptions of communication with specialized theories by scholars, scientists and critics. Chaffee also points out that concept explication can strengthen the ties among theory, observation, and research. This leads us to additional data-reading procedures, which Mason terms as interpretive and reflexive. Here, the researcher's subjectivities come into play - the extent to which an interpretive reading of data needs to be done and the quality of inferences drawn are dependent on the priorities of the investigator, often necessitating reading beyond the data.

At the literal level, this research work explores if political blogs defy classic inverted pyramid rules of news stories format, and if the news stories in traditional media follow those rules. This is my starting point for distinguishing the basic framework of a piece of political journalism from that of a political blog post.

Going beyond the data itself, my interpretive and reflexive skills forward me unto the second wide-ranging question:

How are the political blogs used by journalists to enact persuasive communications?

Persuasive communication here refers to various forms of appeals to the audiences, ranging from more implicitly available interactive tools to move the audience to action, to overtly aggressive political propaganda to win audience attention and affinity. This dissertation offers answers to whether political blogs take recourse to sensational headlines, graphics and informal languages; and if the news stories in traditional media adhere to principles of media ethics and avoid approaches to persuade the audience into making any specific form of political choice.

Linking the third overarching question with the first, I am also interested in exploring the extent of interdependence between blogs and news stories –

How much do news stories vary from political blogs in terms of their reliance on controversial topics?

Of course, since time immemorial, "man bites the dog" has remained the anecdotal definition of a news story; but in real world, journalists have exercised great caution and restrain when it comes to dabbling with sensational topics. In this era where demand for "viral" news stories are more than ever before, are the traditional media houses resisting that temptation? Do blogs tend to use hot topic themes in a more recurrent manner, than do the news stories in traditional media? I wish to investigate this to understand if the operational distinctions between news stories and blog posts are getting blurred, or not yet.

Finally, if blogs and news stories are found to be similarly interacting with their audience, despite having fundamentally different origins, it is pertinent to ask if such interactions point to irreversible changes in the ways we process information. In short, do we need a new way of looking at communication process in these times, when blogging as journalistic medium functions as both the medium and the message? Subsequent to discussing the findings, I shall be proposing a model towards the end of this dissertation, that can explore variables of attention, comprehension and acceptance within the domains of communicator, content, audience and response.

Based on all of the above, there are a few specific research questions which I am attempting to answer with the help of textual analysis. They are as follows:

RQ1 – Are there shifts in language and discourse of traditional news that seem to reflect the blogosphere?

RQ2 – Do comparisons between blogs and traditional news indicate changes in journalistic norms?

RQ3 – How do blogs intersect with traditional journalism? What are the characteristics of relationship between traditional journalism and blogs?

RQ4 – What are the possible impacts of blogs on journalistic standards of objectivity?

RQ5 - In what ways does the influence of the blogosphere appears to be reflected in the headlines and language of non-blog journalism texts, whether overt or more implicit?

Political Blogging and Journalism

Intersection of blogging and journalism does not only indicate a need for financial sustenance which may tend to mirror each other's economic model. There is also quite a bit of stylistic and professional overlap. Invoking the critique of a modern mediated public sphere (Habermas, 1989), one argument suggests that journalists could be taking up blogging in their role as public intellectuals, "given the celebrity culture that permeates the mass media" and thereby engage in "self-promotion at the expense of engaging in ideas – for purposes of enhancing their own position" (Dahlgren, 2012).

Besides, if the space between the state and the society can be construed as a public sphere – a "network for communicating information and points of view" (Habermas, 2006), then the blogosphere as a site of confrontation and negotiations was a likely candidate to have provided it, this season.

Specific to political journalism - the focus of this study - if blogs can be accused of a subjective diaspora, then traditional news articles are not necessarily far off the mark due to various reasons. Even as elements of journalism (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001) offer truth and independence principles as inherent in journalistic practice, there is widespread speculation about the ground realities. Nielsen and Kuhn (2014) describe how political journalism is indeed about "professional achievement, personal fulfillment, and often about money - especially after the commercialization of the press and later broadcasting - but it is also about politics, power, and what Macaulay called 'the safeguards of the public liberty'. It is, in short, as much about democracy as it is about the media."

Speaking of political journalism being in transition in Western Europe and

applying various comparative studies, they argue that it is reinventing itself, what with the journalists increasingly having to work on their own or for struggling media entities while the audience is scattered, skeptical and largely indifferent towards political reporting. There is an element of truth in all of this to the extent that this apparent crisis leads to innovative survival strategies. So, when political journalists hobnob with powerful people they cover, it is precisely because this ethical compromise itself is integral to political journalism.

Nielsen and Kuhn (2014) argue that technological shift in political journalism has concrete effects - there is a decline of the business model for newspapers, there is an expansion in broadcast and online media, and there is a much vaster array of news reports and "professionalization of sources".

Commenting on the challenges and boredom confronting political journalism, Olivier Baisnee (2014) writes, "because journalism is based on unquestioned evidence, political journalists never wonder about whether what they are doing is political journalism." He proceeds to emphasize the work of Gitlin (1980) for whom journalistic frames were "principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters or persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers organize discourse whether verbal or visual". Same goes with the political identity of journalists which remain hidden under the garb of research. Stephen Cushion (2014) writes, "Siebert et al's *Four Theories of the Press* (1956) is often attributed as the first attempt to classify media systems according to their political identity."

This leads one to wonder if the journalists within a certain media system then automatically qualify to be politically biased in favor of sustaining that very system because of core personal values, or is the adherence to advocate for the status quo an inevitable casualty so far as journalistic loyalty (towards readers) is concerned. In other words, are political journalists by default the enactors of a specific political system - whether or not it scientifically violates principle of independence which is touted as an element of journalism? Just like the unchained bloggers, are the corporate journalists too willing to identify their political affinities – and, if their employers have strictures, are they then using their personal blogs to reveal themselves more candidly?

That will be a matter of discussion in my conclusion, but no matter how independent political journalists claim to be, they are like most others in any society, while at the same time they remain part of the very political establishment they tend to critique. What sets them apart from the non-journalistic audience is how Nielsen (2014) describes them: "safely ensconced symbolically as a trustworthy and socially acceptable part of the establishment." This paradox explains Timothy E. Cook (1998)'s suggestion that "the news media in the United States should be seen as constituting a *political institution* despite their firm roots in the private sector."

This institution therefore could be mirroring the turmoil and successes of the political parties as institutions, too. In this dissertation, my objective includes an analysis of the way political writings have indications that the journalists could be taking it unto themselves to fight the kind of wars which are fought by the parties themselves during election years. Just as American politics is increasingly polarized and confrontational in 2015-16 elections year, the blogosphere of political

engagements by political journalists more than indicate the same tensions. Nielsen (2014) relies on researchers who have pointed out five facets that help make sense of contemporary American political journalism functions -

> (1) increased audience fragmentation, (2) an accelerated news cycle, (3) some tendencies towards partisan polarization in the media and in media use, (4) the increased importance of non-journalistic actors in shaping and disseminating news and information, and (5) low levels of public trust in traditional sources of political news - the so-called 'mainstream media'.

The Blogosphere: A Peoples' History

This song is Copyrighted in U.S., under Seal of Copyright #154085, for a period of 28 years, and anybody caught singin' it without our permission, will be mighty good friends of ours, cause we don't give a dern. Publish it. Write it. Sing it. Swing to it. Yodel it. We wrote it, that's all we wanted to do.
- Woody Guthrie (1934)

Eight decades have passed since the legendary folk singer emphatically announced that he wrote his songs with an intent to share them with the world, to raise collective consciousness, and to shun endless profits. As we traverse between "Gutenberg Galaxy", the age of the printing press in a McLuhanesque sense (Stearn, 1967), and a new world of online communication, aptly described by Manuel Castells (2001) as the "Internet Galaxy", there is a continuation of Guthrie's lofty ideals in today's recharged spirit for publishing, sharing and reacting.

This new world of instantaneous publication and global circulation can perhaps be best encapsulated through the rapidly growing phenomenon called the blog, short for weblog. Akin to Guthrie's union songs, today's blogging activities have some clear purposes: to share views actively, to inform audiences of the events, to inspire the

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participants, to elicit reactions, and to generate actions.

From a romanticized vantage point, blogging has enabled the voices of the underrepresented to be recognized duly - the subdued murmurs of the oppressed to register vehement protests, the marginalized indigenous to reclaim a virtual territory, and the unpaid homemakers to build revenues through this unpredictable domain. Blogging has democratized the platform for publishing by ruthlessly challenging conventional control-and-access paradigms and by creating a relatively level playing field. It has bridged the gap between the manufacturers of content and the active audience through dialogic communications that thwart any attempt at a vertical flow of information which predominantly characterize the traditional mass media.

The sheer enormity of the blogosphere has helped change the hitherto perceived equations and patterns of media consumption. A recent survey indicates there are an estimated 31 million bloggers in the United States and 164 million blogs worldwide chiefly distributed across four main platforms: Wordpress, Blogger, Tumblr and Typepad. Wordpress, for instance, hosts over 42 million blogs with 329 million people saying they are viewing a blog. In a typical month, there are 25 billion page views of Wordpress blogs, with 500,000 new posts created each day and 400,000 daily comments logged. Across all blogging platforms, there are over 528 million page views registered each month. Even more striking is the number of bloggers who do not blog for money. It appears that over 81% of users do not make even $100 per month from blogging, with only 8% earning enough to be able to support a family (Rampton 2012).

In such a scenario, blogging has emerged at best as an avocation for most users. Even as millions of users continue posting various updates, they are motivated by

factors other than money. Whether or not this indicates purely an altruistic involvement at a mass-scale is yet to be ascertained, but it shall not be an exaggeration to state, most importantly perhaps, that blogging has helped countless ordinary women and men realize their potential as citizen journalists. It has thus helped create an alternative model of publishing that has collectively posed a threat to "large, arrogant institutions, the Big Media" (Gillmor, 2004). Big Media, Gillmor noted, treated news as a lecture and offered scant choices to the audience, who could certainly write letters to the editors; but the discretion to render those letters visible, and thereby useful, solely remained with the very authority that was being challenged. "It was a world that bred complacency and arrogance on our part. It was a gravy train while it lasted, but it was unsustainable," contended Gillmor.

The test of Internet's inherent capacity to be a radical departure from the conventional media is best administered in a country like Singapore where any form of publishing or broadcasting or performing requires the government's permission. Despite such regulations over media, why did the blogosphere manage to get a free pass there? Apart from the fact that Singapore government wanted to project the country as an "Intelligent Island", Cherian George (2012) writing about journalism and state power in Singapore answered:

> "It has a lot to do with the special characteristics of the Internet as a multi-purpose and open-ended communication technology…They (Singapore government planners) could not easily cherry-pick the purposes for which this infrastructure would be used: e-business could not be promoted without simultaneously allowing e-politics, or e-anything…Even if you had the skill to reprogram your TV set, you could not use the device to send messages over the airwaves unless the organizations that control television broadcasting let you. In contrast, Internet users could - and did - develop the means to share videos,

for example, without any authority needing to unlock the network for this purpose."

Journalists as bloggers may not have transformed as much as they are perhaps transitioning. The roles aside, it is in the technical details that the difficulties may often emerge. As Gunter (2003) noted, journalists in the new media environment need to learn how to organize stories into structures conducive to interactive reading online. Not only should writing the basic news story follow different style, journalists who blog also have to know about effective use of audio, video, animation and databases that may form part of the larger interactive story package available to users.

Tramayne (2007) suggests that the traditional press (which he calls "legacy media") started attacking the blogs because the blogs were "filled with errors and lacking in credibility". At the same time, the traditional media now have embraced the blogs and the political journalists will do well to "take advantage of active citizen-readers to generate better product and lower costs."

A closer look at the canonic elements of journalism helps to unravel the growing challenges in these changing times. As Kovach & Rosenstiel (2007) noted, journalistic elements include the following: (a) obligation to the truth, (b) loyalty towards the public, (c) verifiable quests, (d) independence from those covered, (e) independence while monitoring power, (f) forum for public criticism and compromise, (g) making the significant interesting and relevant, (h) news to be kept comprehensive and proportional, and (i) ability to exercise personal conscience. To what extent then are career journalists able to remain true to the elements, one might ask, considering that there is a noticeable decline of the press in recent times. Nerone et al. (1995) lists the

following four roles played by the press, in the development of the nation-state:

> "*The press provided the primary conduit for information flows between the government and the people.
> * The press provided a public space in which members of civil society could discuss matters of public concern.
> * The press served as the arbiter of facticity and therefore as the site for debates over facticity.
> * It was through the press that the emerging nation-state could find its rhetorical expression (p. 163)."

Nerone et al. (1995) further argued that the new media environment challenges each of these roles. Especially after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, blogs have garnered the attention of journalists and the public alike (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). According to Barlow (2008), no matter how one views the commercial news media, no story is going to gather sustained national attention in America unless the traditional news-media entities carry it. For them to do so, the story has to be "news-worthy," having attained that "certain definable shape" Lippman (1922) referred to. Barlow argues that citizen-journalism or blogging forces the commercial news media to find a way to present the story:

> "Before the Internet, it was difficult for most individuals to get hold of the raw material behind a story. Now with material released frequently by governmental and other entities directly to the Web, and often in great volume, location and traditional forms of access become quite a bit less important" (p. 99).

In face of growing availability and access of materials, it is the journalists who stand to gain the most in their truth-seeking quests. And considering the limitations of the big media whose "agenda-setting" may not permit circulations for all hues of information, and considering the "decline in public service performance" of

commercial media noted by Herman and McChesney (1997), career journalists may turn to blogging as an alternative outlet.

In the area of newsgathering, blogging offers a vastly different and exciting world. With proliferation of access to new media technologies, there's no telling how much has the connectivity growth been accomplished. People everywhere are producing their own contents for public consumption. "Bloggers and citizen journalists can cover the world from their sitting rooms. Through the Internet and social media they have access to information about what is happening in every corner of the world. This has enabled those caught up in breaking news stories to send back instant coverage" (Williams, 2014).

What could be the relationship between this information society and journalism in the traditional form? With abundant amount of information at disposal at any given point in the new media society, how best to make sense of the relationship is a critical question. McQuail (2013) wrote that it would not be irrelevant to suggest that "journalism in one way or another has acted as cheer-leader for the information society." He explained, "The impact (of 'information revolution') comes in two main forms - on the one hand the circulation of 'real-world' information is no longer under the control of the news media, since there are many alternative online sources, often more specialized and faster. On the other hand, journalism is challenged by having to process and make sense of the vast supply of data of potential relevance or of interest to the public, easily overwhelmed by the abundance." (McQuail, 2013).

One of the first journalists to use a blog, a blogger who is currently leading the news content division of AOL News & Information, Jonathan Dube (2013), maintains

a comprehensive online list of blogs produced by journalists. His indexing takes into account four types of Journalist-Blogs or, as they are called in short, J-Blogs: (i) those blogs published by news sites - ongoing, (ii) published by news sites - spot news and events, (iii) published independently by journalists, and (iv) blogs that are personal sites of journalists. For the sake of convenience, I am bringing them under two broad categories: 1) blogs being run by traditional media, and 2) blogs being run independently by journalists/bloggers.

It is within the second category that blogging can be an exercise in identity building for a journalist. Far too often while one is engaged in producing content from one end, it is difficult to grasp the realities of being witnessed by the audience. The communication process through all its various stages, is not neutral (Hall, 1973). Usually there are many sides to every issue, and journalists working within the bounds of traditional media often fail to adequately cover the diversity of voices and views competing for the limited media space. Blogs have the capacity to provide the journalist with occasions to interact with readers from various social locations (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2004), and perhaps even confront a possible gap between personal beliefs and professional beliefs.

With increasing horizontal communication, blogging does not merely alter the rules of traditional news flow; it also posits questions of subjectivity and critical reflections for the journalists, who may initiate inquiries into the awareness of her/his race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, education status, and socioeconomic class. Blogging is "revolutionary," certainly to the extent that it promotes dialogues among the participants and between the journalists and the audience, resulting not so much in

either side wanting to convince or inform the other, as in an exchange about understanding each other (Teurfs, 1994). Journalists, typically unaccustomed to a process where the credibility of news producer is equated with that of the news consumer, may find it naive and idealistic to envision a dialogue with the readers, but for those who blog, consciously aware of the power of dialogic communication, blogging might just provide for a potentially revolutionary tool. The revolution here implies the transformation from being sacrosanct authorities in disseminating information to becoming accessible and open to constructive inputs from the audience. Beyond the metaphors too, authentic revolutionaries have been known to engage in direct communication with the people when it comes to sharing critical information. In the context of how Fidel Castro had to confirm the death of Che Guevara to the Cuban people, Paulo Freire (1970) wrote:

> "A true revolution must initiate a courageous dialogue with the people. Its very legitimacy lies in that dialogue. It cannot fear the people, their expression, their effective participation in power. It must be accountable to them, must speak frankly to them of its achievements, its mistakes, its miscalculations, and its difficulties" (p. 128).

Revolutionary, or not, there appears to be at least some functions of blogging as an online form of activism for the journalists. Some articles seem to indicate that journalists could be actively seeking political engagements denied to them through corporate newsrooms. As Castells (2001) pointed out, throughout the 1990s, major social movements around the world became organized with the help of the Internet, starting from the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, whose electronic network of solidarity was *La Neta*, an Internet-based network organizing Mexican women and

supported by the San Francisco Institute of Global Communication, an NGO of socially responsible "techies." Castells further noted that the entire Indymedia project - a result of media linkage to worldwide public opinion - has emerged as the "information backbone of the anti-globalization movement."

But there is a caveat. Since journalists turn to blogging as an alternative outlet for their expression, it is impossible to determine whether they then employ it as a matter of altruistic advocacy solely, or if some of them also consider profit as the primary goal in their capacity as bloggers? Considering that a blog may provide for a sense of ownership to the journalist who can control the blog in all its aspects, to what extent does the blogging culture then imbibe capitalistic lineages? Does networked individualism indeed provide a radical break from the capitalistic enterprises? These are important thoughts to ponder over while analyzing the future of journalism-blogs, especially since the mainstream media all over the world are eagerly floating their blogs and employing dedicated staffers to oversee those as lucrative business ventures.

Evolution of Blogosphere

Several conflicts of interests appear to have arisen from the intersection between blogging and journalism. There are claims that the professional code of ethics for journalists is under threat owing to evolving standards of objectivity; the necessary credentials that were granted to journalists based on peer reviews are now extended to bloggers; the strict editorial policies that created style sheets and an adherence to hierarchy of editors is mostly nonexistent in the blogosphere; the traditional revenue-making models of attracting advertisers is now going through an overhaul in the traditional media houses by incorporating elements of interactivity akin to the

blogosphere. Lastly, the capability of blogs to publish immediately from the site of events and to effectively integrate a diverse audience in a conversation has led many media houses to hire bloggers themselves.

Blogs, far from being a passing fad, are today a major topic for research "…both because they affect politics in their own right, and as a means of approaching important questions for the social sciences generally" (Drezner & Farrell, 2008).

So how exactly have the blogs evolved over the years?

The first *blog*, short for *weblog*, generally ascribed to Dave Winer, may have first appeared in 1997 (Lasica, 2002, p. 171). But its impacts began to be felt starting in about 1999, when Pyra Labs launched Blogger software that eventually witnessed more than one million registered users blogging, with about a quarter of those actively publishing weblogs (Sherman, 2003). According to Merriam-Webster, the most requested online definition of 2004 was 'blog,' even as this word had not yet been incorporated into the dictionary. The same year, *Time* magazine announced its first "Blog of the Year" (Drezner & Farrell, 2008). Last checked in 2017, the word "bloggable" is part of the major dictionaries and is considered a synonym for "interesting".

Could it be possible that blogging is merely a continuation of age-old communication patterns? Award winning journalist and creator of the "Secrets" series of guidebooks to *The Da Vinci Code*, Dan Burstein (2005) compares the Talmudic tradition with proto-blogging where scholars debated texts that transcended various eras. He cites further instances:

"Renaissance artists and thinkers were bloggers of a kind as well, commenting on what they found of interest and beauty from the cultures of Greece and Rome. Leonardo da Vinci probably wrote the greatest unpublished blog of all time in his more than thirty thousand pages of diary entries. Tom Paine and the great American revolutionary zeal for political pamphleteering in the eighteenth century is another form: Passionate political rants, delivered in real time, designed to be read and discussed by groups of people who are then moved to action as a result" (p. xiii).

The relationship between blogging and journalism has been debated since the inception of the blog itself. New York University's Jay Rosen (2003) attempted an informed comparison between the two, while introducing the radicalism about weblog form in journalism. A few of those are:

1) The weblog comes out of the gift economy, whereas most of today's journalism comes out of the market economy. 2) Journalism had become the domain of professionals, and amateurs were sometimes welcomed into it, whereas the weblog is the domain of amateurs and professionals are the ones being welcomed to it. 3) In journalism, barriers to entry have been high. With the weblog, barriers to entry are low: a computer, a Net connection, and a software program gets you there. 4) In the weblog world every reader is actually a writer, and every writer is also a reader of other weblog writers. 5) A weblog can "work" journalistically even when it reaches a small audience, whereas such a small response would be seen as a failure within traditional journalism. 6) Journalism traditionally assumes that democracy is what we have, information is what we seek. Whereas in the weblog world, information is what we have - it's all around us - and democracy is what we seek.

Bloggers were accorded the first recognition belonging to news media by the federal courts when two of the 100 media seats were reserved for bloggers at the trial of Vice President Dick Cheney's former chief of staff on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice. Media Bloggers Association, an advocacy group working to

extend the powers of the press to bloggers helped secure this feat. And yet, as Alan Sipress (2007) for *The Washington Post* wrote, "The new validation doesn't necessarily clarify the blurry line between bloggers and traditional journalists…Debates over the traditional checks-and-balances process that journalists follow are continuing, and some bloggers are resisting efforts to be put under the umbrella of the traditional news media."

Sipress also quoted Thomas Kunkel, the then dean of the University of Maryland's journalism school: "The Internet today is like the American West in the 1880s. It's wild, it's crazy and everybody's got a gun. There are no rules yet."

The arrest of Jason Chen for blogging about Apple's iPhone prototype on Gizmodo.com revived the debate (McGurn, 2010) about whether bloggers are real journalists. William McGurn (2010) opined on Wall Street Journal that the debate had rejected common assumption among many journalists and politicians that free press should mean special privileges for designated class, and contended that First Amendment is right for all rather than class privilege for some.

The following year, a federal judge in Oregon ruled that a blogger, Crystal Cox, who was sued for defamation, could not claim protections afforded to journalists under state shield laws. In his ruling, the judge noted that the blogger was not affiliated with a "newspaper, magazine, periodical, book, pamphlet, news service, wire service, news or feature syndicate, broadcast station or network, or cable television system." Following the judgment, Cox suggested, "This should matter to everyone who writes on the Internet" (Carr, 2011). This widened up the debate regarding the implications such a ruling had for bloggers and journalists. Kelli L. Sager (2011), highlighting the

pre-Internet laws, stated, "Given the many important stories originating from bloggers, it is hard to imagine a rationale for the wholesale exclusion of those writers from the protections that shield laws provide, whether they are called 'journalists' or not."

Kyu Ho Youm (2011), joining the debate, cited Jason Shepard to suggest that the judges in such rulings should scrutinize the following:

> 1) whether the blogger's stated purpose centered on news-gathering and dissemination;
> 2) whether news-gathering and editorial decision-making processes were regularly employed; and
> 3) whether the end product of the blogger's work was sufficiently important within the context of public interest.

The Blogosphere was soon abuzz with unprecedented apprehensions and online activists who expressed less than satisfaction at Judge Hernandez's suggestions that bloggers were not journalists as defined by Oregon's shield law. Four months later when Electronic Frontier Foundation, a non-profit digital rights group, decided to defend Cox, the motion for a new trial was denied, but such massive campaigns in favor of reassessing the previous judgment led to the district court judge to finally clarify that he never intended to suggest that bloggers can't be journalists, only that Ms. Cox did not fit the definition (Carr, 2012): "I did not state that a person who 'blogs' could never be considered 'media'. I also did not state that to be considered 'media', one had to possess all or most of the characteristics I recited."

In November 2011, one of the pioneering bloggers, Jim Romenesko, whose daily blog on Poynter.org used to attract thousands of journalists, quit his job following a column where his editor Julie Moos questioned his methods (Farhi, 2011). For over 12 years, Romenesko had been compiling news stories and commentaries from various

sources, but increasingly it was noticed that he often used direct passages from those articles without necessarily containing those within quotation marks. However, instead of feeling vindicated, many journalists whose works were quoted thus, actually protested against Moos for the public rebuke, Farhi noted.

The affinity among career journalists for Romenesko was more than incidental. As Jeremy W. Peters (2011) wrote in *The New York Times*:

> He identified the hunger for niche news, and connected his readers through an online community in which they could debate and comment on the story of the day. And if they had an internal memo they wanted to leak him, all the better. He would post it and guarantee anonymity. His last name became a verb that editors hoped they would never find themselves on the other end of — as in, "You just got Romenesko'd." That typically meant one of their memos had leaked on his site (p. B3).

Doing their parts, blogging software companies have also stood by the journalists in their difficult times. In November 2008, the *TypePad Journalist Bailout Program* offered to terminated journalists reeling under recession free professional blog accounts, introducing its own economic bailout plan to aid the media professionals (Wortham, 2008). Writing for *The New York Times*, Wortham quoted a journalism student Brooke-Sidney Gavins: "I understand there may not be a 'guaranteed' job with a major media organization after I graduate. A lot of new journalists are going to have to build their careers more guerrilla-style by selling their stories and promoting their work all the time."

How about the activism component? Thomas Friedman (2012) wrote with less optimism:

Facebook, Twitter and blogging are truly revolutionary tools of communication and expression that have brought so many new and compelling voices to light. At their best, they're changing the nature of political communication and news. But, at their worst, they can become addictive substitutes for real action. How often have you heard lately: "Oh, I tweeted about that." Or "I posted that on my Facebook page." Really? In most cases, that's about as impactful as firing a mortar into the Milky Way galaxy. Unless you get out of Facebook and into someone's face, you really have not acted. And, as Syria's vicious regime is also reminding us: "bang-bang" beats "tweet-tweet" every day of the week.

Mitchell (2012) described how the blogosphere has helped churn out millions of words to explain the Occupy movement, and yet has done little to bring focus to a movement that is purportedly action-oriented. Ball (2011) has also expressed his skepticism regarding the blogosphere's potential as a tool for the activists, since according to his studies thus far, new technology is unlikely to upset existing social relationships.

On the other hand, commenting on how the Internet has become a central node for news, Coleman (2010) says that with migrations of journalism into online spheres, and with dwindling advertising revenues for traditional media, what is at stake is not just the future of journalism, but also the future of democracy.

A traditional role of mainstream news media is to maintain a gatekeeping function that serves to control the flow of information to audiences. Ray Maratea (2008) noted:

The competition for scarce public attention and the limited carrying capacity of mass media both remain fundamental elements of the social problems process; the majority of claims generated in the blogosphere have failed to receive attention from mainstream journalists. This suggests that traditional media still

perform an essential gatekeeping function by filtering newsworthy issues from the blogosphere to news consumers who do not read blogs.

Maratea also stressed that the emergence of blogosphere as a "claims-making arena" may tremendously impact the process of social problems construction.

Concluding her research with the observations that the impact of blogs on political change or democratization was going to be gradual and subtle, Rebecca MacKinnon (2008) noted, "Blogs are playing their part in creating an independent space for discourse, interaction, and collaboration. Physical distances are no longer the barrier they once were for people with common concerns and interests. All of these factors can be expected to contribute to major socio-political change in the long run." As a contrast, McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips (2013) visualized blogs as creators of what they called "the megaphone effect," to analyze how the blogosphere makes a mass audience potentially available to ordinary audience.

The role of blogs in electoral campaigns has been much deliberated upon. In the 2004 U.S. elections, the blog was the most talked about development. The "…blogs produced by individual citizens were seen to act as a watchdog on both politicians and the established media" (Rowbottom, 2006). Likewise, it was observed following the 2008 presidential elections, that politically interested Internet users relied more on blogs than on traditional media and that the blogs were judged to be more credible than online newspaper sites, online cable television sites, and online broadcast news sites (Haynes and Pitts, 2009). Priscilla M. Regan (2010) refers to a general consensus about electoral cycles bearing witness to the fact that blogs are playing an influential role in political organizing, lobbying, fund-raising, and campaigning.

At the same time, Farrell and Drezner (2008) warned of the important limits to the political influence of blogs: "They are important less because of their direct effects on politics than their indirect ones - they influence important actors within mainstream media who in turn frame issues for a wider public." By implication, they suggested that blogs will emerge as increasingly pervasive tool to be employed by politicians and those who influence politics.

Politics of Public Sphere

Manuel Castells (2008) has proposed a model of public diplomacy which is a rejection of the diplomacy of the governments. A public diplomacy is necessitated following the process of globalization, which has generated a new form of public sphere. This new public sphere encompasses a global civil society and potential for global governance with help of communication networks that transcend geographical boundaries. As an implication of this model, the bloggers have the potential to emerge as global citizens while engaging with the networked communications and extrapolating shared meanings across cultures and identities based on their social locations. Castells notes:

> Because we live in a globalized, interdependent world, the space of political co-decision is necessarily global. And the choice that we face is either to construct the global political system as an expression of power relationships without cultural mediation or else to develop a global public sphere around the global networks of communication, from which the public debate could inform the emergence of a new form of consensual global governance. If the choice is the latter, public diplomacy, understood as a networked communication and shared meaning, becomes a decisive tool for the attainment of a sustainable world order.

The question that arises here is if this diplomacy of global citizens also blurs the lines between the public and the private. Papacharissi (2010) writes, "The discourse surrounding the political potential of online news media could be located in the tension between the "private" and the "public" as articulated in contemporary democracies… In the truest form of democracy, negotiation of that which is considered public and that which is considered private takes place within the public sphere." As Habermas (1974) argues, the public sphere presents "…a realm of our social life, in which something approaching public opinion can be formed".

Habermas viewed the public sphere as central to the civil society – one which could facilitate social mobilization through formations of public opinions via a variety of bourgeois sites such as salon, coffeehouses, pubs and restaurants. The rational, enlightened nature of such discourses could well provide the masses with a negotiating platform, if not an empowering capacity to imagine radical alternatives to the ruling classes.

To the extent that the value of the public sphere lies in its ability to facilitate unhindered and diverse discussion of public affairs, blogging inherently has provisions for it. The "project of modernity" which Habermas saw materialize through the printed books and pamphlets in the early 19th century was a bold new way of allowing exchanges of communications and debates among the people who were not at the helm. For identity and social action, face-to-face interaction as well as media communications were crucial.

The blogs as a public sphere also get a nod from Sunstein (2008), who says that the blogosphere "operates as a kind of gigantic town meeting". Wattal et al. (2010),

while analyzing the 2008 U.S. Presidential election found the use of blogs as an "ideal of a deliberative forum" as discussed by Habermas, that "encourages the exchange of different points of view".

Whereas Habermas offers the starting point of analysis to the way public sphere has played an empowering role, and Castells has taken it further to illustrate the various social movements that emerged from online activisms, the unchecked participation of bloggers may have its unique challenges as well. As Kamm (2007) writes:

> Blogs are providers not of news but of comment. This would be a good thing if blogs extended the range of available opinion in the public sphere. But they do not; paradoxically, they narrow it. This happens because blogs typically do not add to the available stock of commentary: they are purely parasitic on the stories and opinions that traditional media provide. In its paucity of coverage and predictability of conclusions, the blogosphere provides a parody of democratic deliberation.

It could also be argued that by providing a "parody of democratic deliberation", blogging proves its nature of being an independent media. Where traditional mass media have been less than perfect vehicles for democracy because of the restricted opportunities for access to, and participation in the public sphere, blogging uniquely addresses the limitations through its inherent features comprising accelerated information flow, interactivity and participation. As McNair (2010) writes, "Without a free and independent media, accessible to the people who rely upon it as their main source of political information, there can be no democracy worthy of the name."

However, Habermas (2006) himself cautions against a climate when it comprises intemperate contributions leading to unedited, unchecked opinions. Interpreted differently, this could be seen as the blogosphere's strength as well. As

Castells (2008) writes, "without an effective civil society capable of structuring and channeling citizen debates over diverse ideas and conflicting interests, the state drifts away from its subjects. The state's interaction with its citizenry is reduced to election periods largely shaped by political marketing and special interest groups and characterized by choice within a narrow spectrum of political option." Even as, in the Habermasian sense, democracy has not prevailed over capitalistic contradictions yet, the fact that blogosphere provides for an opportunity in identity-building for disparate groups who are able to articulate themselves freely, is indication enough for its success as an effective public sphere that needs to be valued.

Identity, Technology and Narratives

Journalists may take part in online identity-building exercises - which contributes to their subjective reporting - through two primary ways: one, by enrolling themselves in activist websites such as *MoveOn* in the U.S., and two, by producing their own contents via personal blogs. In terms of the former, they usually need to answer a questionnaire that locates them in relationship to the action (Bennet and Toft, 2010), answering questions such as: "Who am I? What do I think about this protest? What do I do? Who am I with? Do I belong to their group? Who are they? What do they do? How do they do it? Why?" Polletta (2006) argues that the development of narratives about the reasons for action contributes significantly to participants' self-conceptions and ultimately to the ways that they institutionalize those experiences. "Once organizations generate mission inspiring narratives, they may develop into strategic 'collective action frames' that assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and

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constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (Snow and Benford, 1988).

In terms of the latter, journalists form an active collaborative network in the form of a "blogroll" whereby they consciously include relevant bloggers as part of the proposed network, thus converting a personal blog to a political activist organization, however informal. The research questions in this study delve into the way professional political journalists ease into the domain of personal blogosphere space through their writings and usage of hyperlinks.

Journalists are not immune to be impacted by their own social locations, which indirectly or directly affect the way they write leads, headlines, interview specific people and prioritize one issue over another. Langman (2005) notes: "Social crises, stresses, and strains at economic, political, cultural, or motivation-identity levels, mediated through locally situated interpersonal networks, could migrate from one sector to another. While the directions of chains of influence are variable, in most cases, crises in political or economic spheres have differential impact on people at a given social location and within that location."

There are quite a few examples of identity-building exercises of journalists online. A central concern in communication studies of gender is the issue of identity analysis. Early on, Sandra Herring (1993) identified two separate discourses online: a feminine discourse encompassing a more "personal" style of communication, characterized by apologetic language use and the prevention of tension; and a masculine discourse, typified as being more "authoritative" and oriented toward action, and characterized by challenging and argumentative language use. When these two

discourses met in a "mixed gender" online environment, the masculine discourse dominated: men tended to introduce more subjects and ignored or ridiculed the input of women participants (van Doorn and van Zoonen, 2010). In an earlier study, Herring (1995) proposed that the Internet perpetuates everyday linguistic inequalities between men and women.

"Many women's groups and feminist activists have approached the internet as an international platform for such diverse goals as creating support networks, challenging sexual harassment, discussing feminist politics, creating spaces for sexual self-expression, and rallying against social injustices. In this sense, community is strongly attached to a commitment to social change and resists commercial appropriation by market actors" (van Doorn and van Zoonen, 2010).

Another "assimilation-oriented" Internet use is concerned with having a space to articulate a group identity as immigrants, an identity that is *en route* to participation in identity politics in the host society (Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2010). Mitra (2005) observed that new media offer a "discursive safety zone" where new immigrants "negotiate the identity tension and dissonance." The relationship between locality and sociability is transformed through Internet communications as exemplified by Anthony Giddens (1991) through his concepts of "disembeddedness" and Manuel Castells (2000) through his theory of a "network society". Also dealing with the topic of identity formations, Deborah Wheeler (2010) argues that despite government attempts to censor and police the network,

> …individual citizens manage to work around the state, constructing a wide range of internet meanings and practices, which often challenge norms…. Imagining, discussing and implementing a new future for the Arab world is the goal of many regional bloggers. From all across the political spectrum, young

Arabs narrate their visions for a new Middle East.

Intersections, Primacies and Autonomy

While identities of race, gender, and sexuality-- among other social locations-- intersect in the chains of oppressions and privileges (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2004), and the various social hierarchies such as gender, race, class and nation mutually construct one another (Collins, 2000), the question that interests me the most in this research involves the ways in which distinctions can be made between journalists and bloggers insofar as they express overtly their identities while writing for either medium. Also consequential to this analysis is a class-based finding. In the Marxist sense, "class" is objectively determined in terms of its relations to the means of production, its role in the social organization of labor, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth and in its mode of acquiring it (Lenin, 1919). The subjective facet of a class involves how its members perceive that society is organized across legal, cultural, social and political lines. What then informs the class consciousness of journalists who blog - is this evident in the writings at all, or the class identity hitherto associated with a professional elite journalist does not vary explicitly from that of the top bloggers?

Crucially, how does the world of professional journalism make sense of unpaid blogging? My research uses the theoretical lens of Selma James (2012) to inquire if the blogger is the unwaged worker of the information era. Like James' notion of the unpaid housework, the blogger may be merely "caring" for the news media full-time; in this case should her works be mandatorily compensated with a wage? Is the grassroots journalism as political blogging increasingly becoming known as itself - an "expansion

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of the definition of class" as James envisages about her use of the word "grassroots"? James (2012) writes, "We find that "grassroots" is a unifying term which can also include higher sectors than those traditionally identified as working class, sectors that may be anti-capitalist because they are in some way discriminated against and exploited and not part of the managerial structure. By acknowledging that the working class is divided by sectors, we offer those from higher sectors who have a case against capital access to our collective power in exchange for their accountability - an indication of how broad the movement can be." In this context, my area of investigation points to whether there is an overlap between the writings of the professional journalists and that of the journalist-as-a-blogger a historically alternative world of media – considering their digital access privileges.

Blogging and Journalism during Elections

When Andrew Sparrow, the political correspondent of *The Guardian* was awarded the British national newspaper award for Political Journalist of the Year in 2011, it was for his works in the domain of live blogging. On the night of the election, there were 2 million page views for his election live blog, and despite such a success story Sparrow was criticized heavily among his peers. As Einar Thorsen mentions in the book "Online Reporting of Elections" (2013), a fellow journalist John Symes called this format of live blogging "the death of journalism" and dismissed the Guardian's live blogging format as "radical rewriting of the rules of journalism" and as "nonsensical unstructured jumble".

But this is no longer an exception. Breaking a news online before it is published in print or duly broadcast is a convention these days, and central to this function is the manner of writing that is immediately accessible, a reporting that is prompt, and an appearance online that is visually appealing.

Perhaps what concerns the traditional media pundits is the manner in which blogging enables journalists to express their subjective, activist selves. Eric Boehlert in the book "Bloggers on the Bus" (2009) writes:

> Collectively, bloggers expanded well beyond the traditional role of journalist or commentator; they tossed aside the mantle of objectivity that the boys on the bus had worn for decades. Instead, bloggers raised money, trained leaders, forged vibrant online communities, picked candidates, fostered participation, forged coalitions among existing special interest groups, launched policy initiatives, produced original reporting, called bullshit out on the press, and occasionally, and out of sheer force of will, attached a spine to the Democratic Party, which for much of the decade had been too nervous, too spooked by the pro-war GOP, to acknowledge its proud progressive past. They literally kept the lights on during a very dark period. "Without the netroots, Democrats would not be in the position we are in today, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid announced after the Party's sweeping congressional wins in 2006. "It's as simple as that."

The potential of dividends by appealing to the blogosphere for electoral gains has been well documented. In the 1998 Minnesota gubernatorial contest, an independent candidate Jesse Ventura managed to organize funds just hours before the polls closed (Greer and LaPointe, 2004). John McCain managed to raise over $3 million in donations within ten days (Klotz, 2004). Howard Dean's online efforts were exemplary. "Dean had gone from being an unknown candidate with very few financial

resources to the leader in the race and the most successful primary fundraiser in the history of the Democratic Party" (Chadwick, 2006).

According to Matthew Hindman (2009), the single most important incident in winning the blogosphere respect was the "Rathergate" scandal of 2004 - when Dan Rather had to resign from CBS after being discredited following a blogger's claim that the document shared by CBS to show George W. Bush in poor light, was not authentic. The importance of bloggers was not lost on the Democratic National Convention who decided to give 36 bloggers media credentials the same year.

However, not everything went smoothly in the DNC blogosphere. Hindman wrote, "Much vitriol was directed at bloggers for their salaciousness and ostensible inaccuracy" He cited a reporter of *Christian Science Monitor* who declared that bloggers were "like C-SPAN in the hands of a 19-year-old." The headline of this story was quite telling too: "At the DNC, It's a Blog-Eat-Blog World."

With research questions posed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, combined with context provided in this present chapter, the need is clear for a scholarly exploration of the relationship between the blogosphere and the discourse of election coverages during the year preceding the November 2016 elections.

The following chapter (3) will detail a structured methodology for a case study and content analysis, to provide empirical data that will begin to answer research questions stated earlier, and to begin a research agenda on the impact of the blogosphere on traditional journalism. Subsequent to that, the Chapter 4 of the dissertation will explore findings and possible meanings of the data; and the Chapter 5 of the dissertation

will discuss the implications for practice in journalism and for the future studies on new

media and social media.

Chapter 3: Methodology

An ability to interpret and conceptualize variables based on theoretical knowledge is not enough – without relevant data that have the required offering, no explication is possible. As Chaffee (1991) writes:

> The process of explication embraces both the conceptual world and the real world, crossing those lines repeatedly…Often research begins with a fuzzy idea or a topical term and its conceptual development can never be considered complete. The assiduous investigator can return to various points in this outline from time to time, comparing evidence to ideas in an ongoing process that will last as long as the concept continues to generate interest.

This "comparing evidence to ideas" is central to the process of explication and I am following the pattern to discover various key findings. It will be prudent to recall Melvin DeFleur (1998) who argued that even for any theoretical development in mass communication, the research must follow a programmatic approach. Only if a consensus can be developed around methodological standardization, can there be a possibility of what he called a new *milestone* attained – a process which has not evolved since the 80's. The standardization of statistical analysis is what enables research studies to be replicated – whether or not they pertain to studying a process (as with the current study), or an effect analysis. This understanding provided me with a basis to proceed with analyzing quantified data. The analysis which accorded primacy to data proceeded to then supply crucial findings.

Textual content analysis is not just desirable, but indeed necessary for the purpose of my study where the "volume of material exceeds the investigator's individual capability to examine them" (Holsti, 1969). According to Riffe, Lacy, & Fico (1998), content analysis is a nonobtrusive, nonreactive, measurement technique,

employing which the researcher can draw conclusions without having to gain access to communicators who may be unwilling or unable to be examined directly – "One cannot study mass communication without studying content."

However, content by themselves offer little meaning without the other three branches of the model that is emphasized by Stempel (2003). He says the place of content analysis in communication research is indicated by the following paradigm –

WHO says WHAT to WHOM with WHAT EFFECT

The reason why content analysis is central to communication research is because without access to the content or the information itself, it is impossible to offer a scientific explanation of the phenomenon under observation. Berelson (1952) outlined that the results of a content analysis must depend on the procedure and not the analyst – to this extent it must be *objective*. It should also be *systematic*, meaning all relevant materials are analyzed under a set procedure. *Manifest content* must be coded as they appear, without any bias of the researcher coming into play. Finally, this content must be recorded *quantitatively* - in terms of their numerical values or frequencies.

For the purpose of this study, not just the manifest contents were critical, they were the only materials at my disposal. As a blogger I had access to, and interest in the massive amount of articles and blogrolls. The texts, the headlines, the graphic and interactive elements of online journalism and blogosphere were all constantly inviting me to bookmark the pieces. Referring back to articles required saving the hyperlinks, and clubbing them together by creating themes so that they could be easily accessible.

The world of blogosphere also witnesses variations in temperatures – of intense debates surrounding an issue and of conspicuous absence in covering another. Amidst

the fluctuating emotional drama that surrounds blogosphere of which I have been an ardent follower and participant for years, I sought occasionally to restore some amount of balance by visiting the traditional print. My doses of reassurance were hinged upon my years of experience as a member of the old media, where the masthead was treated above everything and everyone. Anytime I had a doubt about a blog post's veracity, I tended to sway back into the fold of traditional media that provided a sense of security, warmth and a composure that was reaffirming.

But this sense of dichotomous views of the way a political news was supposed to be processed and presented, was not going to last for long. I soon started noticing a bridging of gap between the two worlds. It was of course too random an observation since I was a loyal reader of only a handful of publications, both in terms of blogs and print media. My curiosity as a researcher grew thereon and I drew from the lessons of research methods to create a plan whereby I could amply study a variety of publications within both the blogosphere as well as traditional press and examine my research questions subsequently, with the help of a strong theoretical framework.

The Blogosphere by the Numbers

The sheer enormity of blogosphere is too telling to be not considered for the purposes of this research. So, here are some findings –

According to the Nielsen survey, the growing number of blogs mirrors a growth in bloggers. Overall, 6.7 million people publish blogs on blogging websites and another 12 million write blogs using their social networks. Its October 2011 survey concluded

there were 173 million blogs on the Internet, with women making up the majority of

bloggers (1 in 3 bloggers being Moms).[65]

Figure 1: **Growth of Blogosphere**
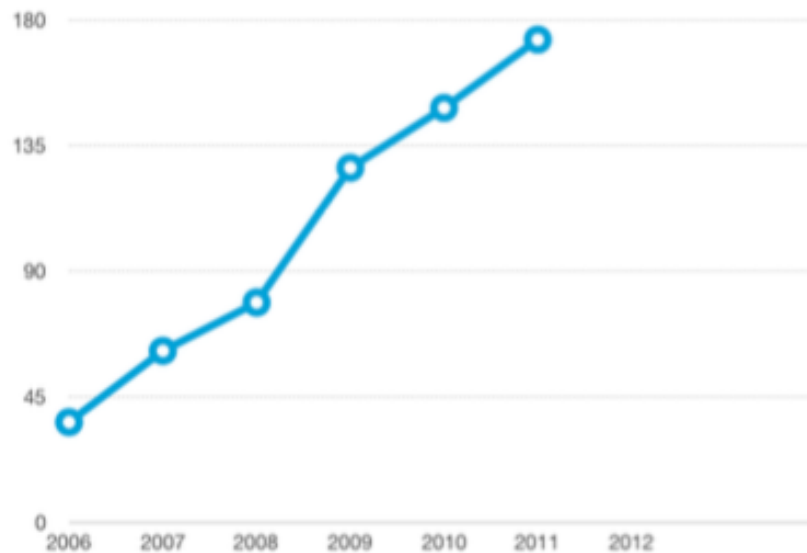
The number of blog readers is equally staggering – 346 million people read

blogs throughout the world, which is 77% of the Internet users.[66] Specific to the US,

Internet users spend 3x more time on blogs than they do on emails. People reading

blogs in 2013 reached 128 million per month, with almost 58% of the US population

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[65] (2012, March 8). Buzz in the Blogosphere: Millions more bloggers and blog readers. *Nielsen*. Retrieved from http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2012/buzz-in-the-blogosphere-millions-more-bloggers-and-blog-readers.html

[66] Edgecomb, C. (2016, December 2). Blogging statistics: 52 reasons your company blog is worth the time & effort. Retrieved from https://www.impactbnd.com/blogging-statistics-55-reasons-blogging-creates-55-more-traffic

reading blogs and the Internet population of bloggers in the US alone stood at nearly 38 million.

The last Technorati report on "State of the Blogosphere"[67] indicated the following-

> More than half of bloggers plan on blogging even more, and 43% plan on expanding the topics that they blog about. All professional blogger segments are generally blogging more this year than they were last year. And 48% of all bloggers believe that more people will be getting their news and entertainment from blogs in the next five years than from the traditional media. As consumers' trust in mainstream media is dropping, they definitely share bloggers' optimism for the blogosphere's future.

According to the Alliance for Audited Media (2016), in terms of the total circulation of news magazines in the US, *People Magazine* has a total paid and verified circulation figure of 3,418,555, followed by *Sports Illustrated* with 3,057,042, *Time Magazine* with 3,032,581, and *New York Magazine* with a circulation of 404,573. The fifth leading magazine is *Village Voice* with around 120,000 readership. Combined, their total circulation is a little over 10 million.[68]

According to Cision (2014), the top five newspapers in terms of circulation include USA Today (2,301,917), the New York Times (2,101,611), the Wall Street

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[67] Technorati (2010, November 3). State of the Blogosphere 2010. *Technorati.* Retrieved from http://technorati.com/state-of-the-blogosphere-2010/
[68] Alliance for Audited Media (2016). Periodical Analyzer. *Audited Media*. Retrieved from https://www.auditedmedia.com/data/media-intelligence-center/periodical-analyzer

Journal (1,337,376), Los Angeles Times (467,309), and New York Post (424,721). The combined circulation figure does not even reach 7 million.[69]

Viewership of ad-supported broadcast and cable news channels also provide useful insights in this regard. I am going to quote here the highest viewership figures reached during the peak season of the past election, starting from pre-primary phase that is under consideration in the present study (December 28, 2015 to December 18, 2016). According to Nielsen (2016), Fox News witnessed a jump of 36% of viewers leading to 2,475,000 viewers. CNN had a leap of 77% in viewership going from 732,000 to 1,298,000. MSNBC too jumped 77% - from 596,000 to 1,113,000. Other two top news channels in this bracket had a fall in viewership - Univision lost about 24% of its viewers and had an audience totaling 1,933,000, while ESPN lost about 11% of its viewers and had an audience totaling 1,912,000. The top five exclusive news channels therefore aggregated a total viewership of 8.7 million.[70]

These are of course broad comparisons and may not yield scientific data to answer any subset of questions. But as a point of entry, they suggest at the very least, the overwhelming popularity and readership of the news blogs in the United States. Just a randomly picked conservative blog such as Breitbart alone commands a circulation of 12.5 million and Politico on the liberal side has a readership of 15 million. Individual blogs have more circulation than the combined readership of top five

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[69] Cision Staff (2014, June 18). Top 10 US daily newspapers. Retrieved from http://www.cision.com/us/2014/06/top-10-us-daily-newspapers/
[70] Schneider, M. (2016, December 27). Most-Watched Television Networks: Ranking 2016's Winners and Losers. IndieWire. Retrieved from http://www.indiewire.com/2016/12/cnn-fox-news-msnbc-nbc-ratings-2016-winners-losers-1201762864/

newspapers, or combined readership of top five magazines, or combined viewership of top five television news channels. At a combined scale, top five blogs have a readership of 187 million – which far surpasses combined audience population of leading forms of traditional news media – newspapers, magazines and television channels. Similarly, the top political bloggers and journalists across the blogosphere have immense social media clout. The top five most influential among them alone raked in over 12.7 million followers (Statsocial, 2014).

All these numbers tell a tale – non-traditional journalism is thriving – in terms of popularity, power and revenues. A *New York Times* report dated March 31, 2017 disclosed that Stephen Bannon whose assets were upwards of $35 million, earned as much as $2.3 million in 2016, including $191,000 as consulting fee from Breitbart News. The report said Mr. Bannon planned on selling his stake in the political consulting firm "Cambridge Analytica" which boasts of its ability to "predict the personality and hidden political leanings of every American adult" through what it called *psychographics*. The same conservative blog, Breitbart, paid its reporter Julia Hahn a salary of $117,217, who also has custodial account and stock funds worth over million dollars – the value of which have appreciated after she joined the blog.[71]

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[71] New York Times (2017, March 31). Who's worth what at the White House: The financial disclosures. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/31/us/politics/white-house-releases-staff-financial-disclosures.html?_r=0

The Political Blogs

Since the focus of my research is political blogging, I did not have to consider 173,000,000 blogs. Instead, I looked at various factors to determine the most popular political media in the blogosphere. For the circulation of the blogs, I used the data provided by Alexa Global Traffic Rank and Compete US Traffic rank.

Table 1: **Top 15 political websites/blogs** *(December 2016)*

Blog	Circulation (Unique monthly visitors – est.)	Political orientation
Huffington Post	110 million	Liberal
The Blaze	25 million	Conservative
Drudge Report	21 million	Conservative
NewsMax	16 million	Conservative
Politico	15 million	Liberal
Salon	14 million	Liberal
Breitbart	12.5 million	Conservative
DailyCaller	10 million	Conservative
The Washington Times	9.75 million	Conservative
CS Monitor	9.5 million	Non-partisan
WND	9 million	Conservative
DailyKos	6.5 million	Liberal
ThinkProgress	6 million	Liberal
Townhall	5.5 million	Conservative

Among the top 15 most circulated blogs are 9 conservative blogs and 5 liberal ones. In terms of circulation however, more people read liberal blogs than they do conservative blogs that are included within the present study.

Sample Selection

Given the dynamic nature of blog popularity and clout, I used the resources of StatSocial list which analyzes over 3000 political bloggers and journalists to gauge

their social influence. Lists compiled by StatSocial have been published on forbes.com and are credible due to their reliance on Twitter to measure influence. It also encompasses a sub-list that ranks political bloggers and journalists depending on the affinities of their followers: most right, left and centrist leaning social audiences. However, it does not include data about the political orientations of the journalists/bloggers. Hence, I have included that as a separate variable to research if the individual journalists/bloggers identify it themselves, or not.

From the list of top political journalists and bloggers as compiled by StatSocial, I have sampled 100 blog articles. These articles are selected from independent political blogs. An independent blog implies one which is not directly associated with a traditional media house. While using these articles, I have disregarded the professional backgrounds of the bloggers themselves. In this sense, one journalist may be working for a major print or broadcast media, but could be running a blog whose entity is separate from that of her employer.

In addition to the above 100 articles, I have also used 200 more blog posts that are not necessarily found on the list of StatSocial. This was done because of two reasons - 1) In addition to relying on the list of top journalists and bloggers, I sampled articles by bloggers associated with top news publications of the country, since otherwise independent bloggers over the years have found a spot for themselves within major print and broadcast media. Not to mention, many leading publications are running syndicated blogs on a regular basis, and indeed over the years, blogs have been integrated within online versions of traditional print media. 2) StatSocial list of influential political bloggers and journalists was not diverse enough, and I wanted to

include in my research bloggers/journalists of color, women and LGBT journalists/bloggers. Therefore, keeping the above two factors in mind, I sampled 100 more articles, authored by bloggers for the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. I chose two mainstream publications because they could then be treated as authoritative as the top ranking bloggers/journalists compiled by StatSocial.

For the *New York Times*, these blog articles appeared under "The New York Times on the Web" or as "The New York Times Blogs (Taking Notes)", whereas for the *Washington Post*, they appeared online as any of the following: "Washington Post Blogs", "Washington Post Blogs - The Fix", "Washington Post Blogs - The Answer Sheet", "Washington Post Blogs - The Plum Line", and "Washington Post Blogs - Right Turn". The remaining 100 blog posts which I included in my dissertation are from the *Huffington Post*, as it is ranked the top political site by Alexa/Amazon, and has the distinction of winning the first Pulitzer Prize as a digital media enterprise in the country.

In the second phase of selecting samples, although I could sense some unique characteristics of blog articles while perusing through the 300 blog posts, I wanted to delve deeper to make note of how different were the writings as they appeared on the traditional media. This has after all been my research interest. And so, I decided to sample articles from leading print media to compare their content with that of the blog articles I had sampled. Decision on print media was based on the circulation figure of the entities. I chose USA Today, New York Times and Washington Post as three leading newspapers which did adequate coverages of 2016 elections.

Since I have active subscription to the *New York Times*, I browsed through the print edition to select articles that were overtly discussing the elections. I looked for mentions of leading candidates, and of themes that were recurring on the blog articles sampled previously. The print edition I chose was the late final edition. I noted down the page number and section for each article, and kept count of the total number of words. For the *Washington Post* and *USA Today*, I used LexisNexis database to retrieve articles from their print editions. I also noted down their page numbers, section names and total number of words.

I sampled a total of 100 articles from the print media and used the findings on a coding sheet about which I shall discuss shortly.

Word Count - I have tried to sample articles that exceed at least 200 words. The maximum number of words an article in my database has, is 4,757.

Time Period - Among the 400 blog posts and news articles I have sampled, 300 posts were published online between November 15, 2015 and January 15, 2016. This two-month period was crucial, owing to abundant and enthusiastic media coverage of speculations and critical analysis surrounding impending results of the 2016 delegate count and primary. The first round of primary voting results came in on February 1, 2016 from Iowa (the final result from Washington DC was on June 14, 2016).

Deciding on the variables is a crucial task that must take into account characteristics of both journalism and blogging. Journalism's goal for objectivity is predicated upon a belief that bias, while it cannot be entirely eliminated, must be minimized. Hence, Philip Meyer's proposal that journalists should adopt scientific method in their reporting has been long embraced by many (Meyer, 2002). Meyer defined precision journalism as "treating journalism as if it were a science, adopting scientific method, scientific objectivity and scientific ideals to the entire process of mass communication." Adoption of scientific method with help of conducting polls and using statistical methods requires according to Mayer, "a disciplined search for verifiable truth."[72] To that extent, "precision journalism involves little more than the maintenance of the journalist's traditional role, with only a modest quantitative improvement in speed and accuracy" (p. 231).

These traditional roles of journalists then distinguish the professional journalists from the bloggers. In "How do journalists think: A proposal for the study of cognitive bias in newsmaking", Stocking and Gross (1989) write, "In journalism, there is also the general expectation that journalists will not be overly driven by preconceived ideas." They go on to quote Blundell (1986) who wrote, "A reporter must never hold inflexibly to their preconceptions, straining again and again to find proof of them where little exists, ignoring contrary evidence and passing up chances to explore fruitful areas that didn't figure in their early thinking:…events, not preconceptions, should shape all

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[72] Sylwester, M. (2001). Journalism and the scientific method. *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, *58*(4), 389-391.

stories in the end." American journalists are also expected to adhere to objectivity norms as much as possible, considering that their reports are subjected to editorial reviews which then enforces a style sheet.

To this extent, it is important that I take into consideration objective variables such as the kinds of issues/topics that are covered in the articles. Some of the controversial or newsmaking articles during the pre-primary phase pertained to ISIS/terrorism, immigration, release of emails, sex scandals, and financial disclosures of candidates. I proceeded to include all of the above in the study.

Third Party and Balancing Candidates

Which leading candidate is covered more? Are all the political parties equitably covered? Questions such as these which I have investigated into are important because some journalists present multiple versions – if not just the pros-and-cons – of the conflicting views to create a "balance" to the coverage. According to sociologist Gaye Tuchman (1978), reporters both "create and control controversy" and spin "a web of mutually self-validating facts". In the review of her pioneering work *Making News*, Todd Gitlin (1980) writes that Tuchman validates an ethnomethodological paradigm of news by conclusively locating how reporters "legitimate the dominant institutions, and the dominant individuals within then, while adopting the claims and mannerisms of objectivity".[73] Thus news becomes a *reproducer* of the status quo – by casting a "news net" which is analogous to a system of power distribution that according to Robinson (1981), "catches only certain kinds of fish at points where the activities of legitimized

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[73] Gitlin, T. (1980). *Contemporary Sociology*, *9*(1), 99-99.

institutions and the organizational needs of newswork intersect."[74] Tuchman argues that the facts of reporting stand out within a self-validating "web of facticity" and generate news narratives that sustain and feed into the same "web".

To observe this phenomenon of self-sustained web of influential journalists and bloggers, I proceeded to study which candidates received what kind of coverage and if there was a pattern of dominant themes subsuming the rest.

Inverted Pyramid

Yopp, McAdams and Thornburg (2010) write in *Reaching Audiences: A Guide to Media Writing*, "Leads must get to the point quickly, and messages must provide important information right behind the lead. Newspaper editors have recognized that need for decades. Tell the essential message in the first four paragraphs of the story. Details that could be cut would follow" (p. 147). The inverted pyramid style also requires familiar words and relatively short sentences.

Over time, some interdisciplinary media scholars have challenged inverted pyramid structure[75] and there's a possibility that the deviations from traditional norms are deliberate. Yet, there is value in studying if the canonic prescriptions are adhered to by not only the traditional media, but more importantly, by the blogosphere itself. This will likely set the stage for a better understanding of mutual dependence and nature of intersection that exists between the both. So, I undertook a content analysis which

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[74] Robinson, J. (1981). Social Forces, 59(4), 1341-1342. doi:10.2307/2578016
[75] Walker, D., Geertsema, M., & Barnett, B. (2009). Inverting the Inverted Pyramid: A Conversation about the Use of Feminist Theories to Teach Journalism. *Feminist Teacher, 19*(3), 177-194.

included carefully scrutinizing of the format of articles to see if the articles employed an inverted pyramid structure, or whether the articles were more rambling informal expressions, or sidebars to major stories.

Coding the Sample

My first sample of articles are political blogs. Here, I am including syndicated blogs across traditional press organizations (such as the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and *USA Today*, etc.), and the organic/freestanding blogosphere (such as the *Wonkette*, *DailyKos*, the *Huffington Post*, etc.). My second set of samples consists of news articles published by leading daily newspapers and their online versions.

In my coding sheet, "daily newspapers" refer to traditional print media, whereas "personal homepage" refers to articles published by bloggers or journalists on their personal blogs. A blog article from the website of a major publication is counted as a "syndicated blog". Since I will be making comparisons between traditional media and blogosphere however, I intend to combine all blog articles as one variable and all print articles as the other.

I developed codes that would capture the characteristics of each blog or article. It is a pragmatic approach in the sense that it helped me retrieve an article from the physical pool of documents. Secondly, I could refer to articles by their ID# in my data analysis chapter, before formalizing the conclusion. The first sample was coded by using a number set starting with a different number from how the second set was coded (for instance, all blog articles began with the number 2, and all news reports started

with number 3). This also facilitated the easy retrieval of an article when needed, so I could look for specific answers within the article.

The date for each blog post and news article was included in the coding sheet, to provide insight into the time period within which a specific theme was being published more often compared to the other days of the sampled phase. All dates ranged between November 15, 2015 to January 15, 2016. The articles were grouped into two time periods by choosing mid-December as the middle point of the date range. This was necessary to address the research questions seeking answers about the qualitative shifts in style and content, as the primary elections neared.

For some of the articles that were authored by more than one writer, only the lead author was analyzed, as the dissertation focuses more on the content of the articles/blogs. For the gender of the author, a woman was coded separately than the man. Where the gender was not clear, or there was no byline, I coded those separately.

A lead author's professional title can be a crucial indicator of their relationship with blogs/media. For example, an author might be writing on an independent blog, but she could also serve as a senior staff writer for a major media organization. This would help us to understand the intersection between blogosphere and traditional media. Some examples of professional titles that I have sampled include blogger, political correspondent, commentator, reporter, editorial writer, senior media writer, blog editor, columnist, etc.

Just as some bloggers may be anchored in the media world, so also blog posts that I have sampled could be anchored in the news articles in major media publications. My variable "Anchor of blog" answers the following questions - Does the blog link to

an opinion page of the print media, or to a regular feature, to a news article on the inside pages, or to a front page, or is it entirely an external link. These are questions to explicate how the blog is tied to traditional media.

Followers

Followers is one of the important criteria to determine the credibility of the author. Credibility for a traditional media is often determined by their circulation. Conversely for bloggers, it possibly depends on the subscribers. However, since subscription data for all blogs are not always available, and since the traditional media being sampled are online, credibility was coded using one uniform parameter that could be applied to both sets of data. That parameter was "followers" on the social media. I coded the number of followers on Twitter for two variables. In the first case, I listed the number of followers on Twitter of lead blogger and lead journalist. Follower statistics could be found on their respective Twitter accounts. In the second instance, I listed the number of followers on Twitter for the publication itself (whether blog, or news media).

However, the limitation of Twitter is it is not a reliable measure for credibility. For instance, not all followers may be genuine users, and not all followers may actively read every tweet of the source followed. At the same time, these very lacunae are also present when we consider the circulation figures of newspapers. Not every subscriber to a newspaper reads it. StatSocial and other ranking outlets consider the number of Twitter followers as a valid way to determine clouts of political journalists/bloggers. Therefore, I chose to adopt that measure.

Political Identity

The next variables describe the political identity of journalists/bloggers. This research explores if there is a trend among journalists outing their political affinities. If so, are the authors describing themselves as such? Similarly, is there any evidence that the authors are classified by others as either liberal, conservative, libertarian, etc.? This is deduced from the Google or Wikipedia search results, news articles, or by assessing the political affiliations of their Twitter followers.

I also coded samples based on whether images and captions accompanied the story. What photos depict – online and on print – could offer more insights into the article's format and style. For example, are there images in the online versions of print articles that do not carry them. Such depictions can also tell us which candidate or issue the story is about. It may also be helpful in determining the relationship of a specific theme with a specific candidate. For instance, if the theme of a story is terrorism and the story's image is of Donald Trump, such combination could strengthen a specific narrative.

The format of blog/story is a critical variable to address my research questions. This research seeks to answer if a given article follows the inverted pyramid structure, or if the article contains unstructured informal expressions, if it is a sidebar to a major story, if it references to external links, if it is a recap of the day's event, or if it is simply a commentary.

Obviously, a story could be coded in more than one of the categories above. It could be structured in an inverted pyramid and also include external links. Therefore,

two more variables are added to code the format of a blog/story - "Format of blog/story - Second choice" and "Format of blog/story - Third choice".

The next variable is the story length. It helps us notice any patterns of averages to answer if blog stories are generally longer than print articles.

The headline is clearly the initial and can be the most visible indicator of an article's orientation (in some cases of course, readers may look at an image at first before even glancing at the headline). The headline was also an important variable in the spreadsheet for easy retrieval of an article when needed during data analysis process. Therefore, words and phrases in the headlines are coded to notice certain patterns of informal texts in an article.

For purpose of this study, the number of comments is considered a variable in interactivity. However, since not all stories have comments, I coded and calculated only those articles which had them. Likewise, the next variable asks if any comments are being highlighted by the publication/blog. This can be critical to the understanding of how traditional media might be taking cues from the blogosphere. There could be many articles where comments will not be applicable simply because those articles/posts are hosted on websites without built-in commenting feature.

The next set of variables can offer answers to the research question that asks if the language in an article departs from conventional news style. This study asks four questions to make such deductions. Firstly, the unconventionality may lie in the language being unorthodox - querying therefore if the article addresses or questions the readers in first person. Secondly, the unconventionality arises if the article gives personal references, narratives and first person accounts.

The third option in this variable asks if the article uses slangs, profanities, or informal language not suitable for the public press. Lastly, I am interested in finding out if the article calls distinguished politicians by first names. Each option is coded to determine if the article has departed from conventional news style. Where it is not clear that it departs, I have coded them accordingly.

The variable "Polls and Statistics" relates to the persuasive elements in a story. Interactivity elements take up the next four variables. As the first one in this section, the question concerns the most numerous interactivity element (among links, tweets, ads and videos) and the options are coded according to their order of appearance. The next two are the same interactivity elements, but they are listed as the second most numerous and the third most numerous. The fourth variable in this section asks if the readers are encouraged to respond to polls.

Themes

The set of 10 indicators that deal with the "themes" variable answers the intersection of blogging with traditional journalism. I used my discretion to pick nine major topics that were being discussed during the phase that I am researching. Does the blog/story discuss social issues, or personal issues, or both social and personal issues in the context of - a) ISIS or terrorism, b) women's rights issues, c) gun control, d) immigration, e) ban on Muslims, f) release of emails (of Hillary Clinton), g) financial status of candidates, h) Bill Clinton's sex scandal, and i) mentioning of, or insinuating a candidate as a liar?

To ascertain another incidental finding, and in an effort to be more inclusive, I coded whether an article included media's coverage of a third political party. Of

specific interest was, if the blogosphere is emulating traditional media in depicting (or not depicting) a "third party".

Whether a story mentions Bernie Sanders, Ted Cruz, or both Cruz and Sanders is the next variable. This coding will help us to better understand if the article's coverage were primarily geared towards highlighting certain candidates over others - and if so, if the bloggers imitated the traditional press in this area. Although there is no direct relationship between the frequency of appearance in text of a candidate or party, with the inclination of the reporter/blogger to favor the same, it is useful at least as an exercise to notice a coverage or a lack thereof, of specific views expressed by certain candidates/parties.

The next variable is predictions about the candidate that is going to win a debate or a poll. Again, this helped to answer if the traditional media reflected the blogosphere culture of making predictions and rendering judgments.

The final variable in the coding sheet determines on which of the two leading candidates (Clinton or Trump) the article is more focused. This can be important to determine a "balance" of news coverage. If it is presented equally for both the candidates, the article is coded to be objective. I am counting the number of times the name of either of these candidates appears on each story to determine the focus.

All the variables above were reached at after sufficiently establishing "intercoder reliability" (Neuendorf, 2002).

In the next chapter, I am describing the way I have used most of the aforementioned variables to reach quantitative findings, as well as some of them to aid me in analyzing the content more qualitatively.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

A study in impacts of blogs on traditional news can be useful on many counts. For one, the sacrosanct nature of newspaper writing can be revisited, now that the newsrooms of prominent media headquarters have started to act as conduits for a rather irreverent blogosphere. A data analysis as undertaken in the current work throws some lights on the extent to which the traditional norms of journalism have been thus influenced, if not challenged. Have the language pattern, style, essence, and format undergone any major/shocking revisions? Even more so, there's the possibility of reversal in gatekeeper role when both the worlds collide – a data analysis of gathered sample during an eventful, if not tumultuous, time-period can offer insights into who gets to steer the narratives. Are there specific issues which got more prominence following the ruckus in the blogosphere, and if so, how? Going back to the original poser, can impacts of blogs even be studied through a textual analysis? Thankfully for the current study, the answers – both conclusive and indicative - are all inherent in the analyzed data.

Whither Objectivity

One of the primary claims of journalism has been that of an aspiration to objectivity. A starting point of analysis was to look for percentage of stories in traditional news and in blogs that showed specific hallmarks of style. After core styles were analyzed in Table 1, the next table (Table 2) probed into objectivity, focused more on the coverage of specific candidates and how each media domain worked towards playing a balancing act (or, not).

*Table 2: **Style Analysis** - Percentages of stories in traditional news and in blogs that show particular hallmarks of style. Chi-square analysis shows statistical significance at p ≤ 0.05*

Hallmarks	Traditional News in sample N= 100	Blogs of all kinds in sample N= 200
Departs from traditional news style	31.5%	68%
Directly addresses, questions readers in first person	32.1%	66.7%
Gives personal references and narratives, first person account	42.6%	55.9%
Uses slangs, slight profanity, extremely informal language not suitable for press	24.5%	74.8%
Calls distinguished politicians by first name	13%	5.5%
Makes predictions or issues judgments about who is going to win a debate or poll	39.2%	59.5%
Mentions or insinuates anyone as a liar	43.6%	55.3%
Includes statistics and polls	7%	15.6%

Table 2 offers intriguing answers to objectivity analysis based on hallmarks of styles – even as blogs more or less continued with their traditional givens, the mainstream press addressed and questioned readers in first person as much as 32.1% of times. Instances abound. A *New York Times* story uses rhetorical lines to pull the readers: "Take him at his word – albeit, a worthless thing given his propensity for telling outright lies and not backing down when called on them – Donald Trump's reign would be a police state." Or, phrases such as "Let's do the math…Let's start with his most far-reaching crush of cruelty…" A *Washington Post* story has phrases like, "We seem to have no trouble demanding that moderate Muslims condemn the radicals", "Our failure to communicate with one another can lead only to the sort of frenzied embrace of isolationism…" A *New York Times* reporter actually pleads, "Hear me out. If you've logged on to Twitter and Facebook in the waning weeks of 2015, you've surely noticed that the Internet now seems to be on constant boil...much of the Internet is terrible."

As factual as that may be, and indeed while that assertion even vindicates the rationale of this dissertation, it is also true that journalists of prestigious press voluntarily joined the chorus of that "terrible Internet" towards the end of 2015. Apart from addressing the readers in first person, there were numerous instances of journalists liberally using first person narratives, or subjective lenses – as much as 42.6% of times in this period – which is merely 13% less than how much the blog stories adopted a subjective lens at the same time. A sentence like "I had hoped the president might call on Americans to do their part" was found in traditional press, just as an ending to a news article with these words, "I can't believe I am saying this. But I might prefer

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President Trump". Even more dramatic - a reporter from traditional press ending his article with these lines, "The Republican race is Donald Trump and then everyone else. That's been true for the better part of the past six months. Those are two sentences I never thought I would write. Ever."

Those sentences were indeed written and published in print newspapers – almost as a tribute to the growing influence of blogosphere. What else could explain the statistics that pointed to a quarter of the entire newspaper samples employing slangs and informal languages? Unsuitable language was found in 24.5% of traditional newspaper reports. Of course in this area, blogs deviated from norms profoundly more, with as many as 74.8% of those using informal texts. Just to exemplify, traditional press entertained and got away with describing Donald Trump as "fascinating…in a perverse way", "a circus clown"; Hillary Clinton as having a "tin ear…unlike her husband". Phrases like these also appeared in established press - "This isn't about shutting off Mr. Trump's bullhorn", "a howling audience", "Cruz as an obnoxious self-promoting egomaniac", and Hillary Clinton's "approach is every bit as lame".

Calling Politicians by First Names

The surprising finding here is the number of times that the articles addressed prominent politicians by first name during this phase. Traditional media in fact used them twice the amount of time compared to blogs. This was also evident on the headlines at times. For instance, *Washington Post*'s headline on January 5, 2016 read: "Bill Clinton hits N.H. trail for Hillary" and the intro was a single line – "Will the former president be an asset or a liability to his wife's campaign?" A columnist for *Post*

directly addressed Clinton with her first name when she wrote, "that notorious Hillary nutcracker" in an article which also used a first name on its headline: "Trump is right: Bill is fair game".

A *New York Times* headline went informal on the first name itself by calling Clinton as "Hill" (while President Obama was shortened to "O") – "Hill's horrific ISIS strategy: Repeating O's mistakes".

A *USA Today* report likewise referred to first names on its headline, "It's fair game to play the Bill card against Hillary", as well as within the body: "Worse yet, bringing up Bill's misbehavior also brings up Hillary's role in covering for him, and in attacking and humiliating his accusers."

In some instances of course, the first name was used within quotes often attributing to someone else. In an article, Democratic strategist Bill Burton is quoted as saying: "Hillary's position is very strong, and I don't think a process story here and there is going to have much impact on her stance with any particular group in the Democratic orbit." Likewise, another story quoted a university professor as saying, "I believe Hillary is a lock to sweep the Deep South". Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio were also targeted. One headline read: "How Marco turned the tables".

Making Predictions

Making predictions in factual journalism is unethical in the context of the principle of objectivity. And yet, the sampled traditional press reports performed poorly in this area. 39.2% of all news articles made predictions for who was going to win a debate or a poll. In the blogosphere, quite predictably, the instances were way higher at 59.5%. As one example, a *New York Times* story appeared to be nodding to a

prominent blogger from *Vox*, read: "Many white Americans are most likely drawn to Mr. Trump's xenophobic, anti-immigrant message because they agree with it." It went on to explain the prediction, "Such voters are nostalgic for the country they lived in 50 years ago…"

In another article from the *Times* (#2067), the introduction read, "In American politics, one narrative – one question – eclipses all others: who will become the 45th president?" This was of course being asked before the primaries even began. But the reporter didn't hesitate to predict that there was no way a third-party candidate could win, and nor would the race involve Donald Trump. He wrote that his article therefore, "in the spirit of the holidays, will be a Trump-free zone."

Calling the Candidates Liars

If candidates were engaged in accusing each other, then some media did not often hesitate to report them in similar fashion. A few notable headlines included – "Lawrence O'Donnell blasts media for not calling Trump a liar", "NYT publishes scathing takedown of Trump's 'racist lies'", "Here's why it seems like Donald Trump never tells the truth", "Trump: Clinton lies like crazy", "Death, lies and pandering on the campaign trail".

Balancing of Conflicting Views

In news coverages of the presidential debates, there has been undeniably a pattern in the media coverages. This election season, it was no different. Almost all the sampled articles, barring one, alluded to a third political party. The hegemonic tendency at the political power level also was observed at the level of news coverage. This is a

curious finding for the reason that it points to the manner in which bloggers may be increasingly shaped by journalistic norms.

Despite the claim to champion the underdogs (Gillmor, 2004) and to highlight those aspects that go uncovered in the mainstream press, political bloggers during the period of this study have emulated their journalism counterparts and stuck to the dominant narratives for the most part.

Likewise intriguing is the implicit endorsement of the leading candidates by the media publications prior to the expression of popular mandates. Table 3 shows how 59% of traditional news articles did not cover non-leading candidates at all, whom 70.9% of blogosphere had overlooked.

Another way to study balance of view is by analyzing if the same article that mentions one leading or non-leading candidate, also mentions their respective opponents. In this case, of those articles which covered either Bernie Sanders or Ted Cruz, 3% of the articles mentioned both candidates. Similarly, 9% of the stories that covered the leading candidates paid equal emphasis to both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

*Table 3: **Balance of Views** - Percentages of stories in traditional news and in blogs that show balancing of conflicting views.*

Hallmark	Traditional News in sample (N= 100)	Blogs of all kinds in sample (N= 200)
Mentions a third party	1%	0.0%
Mentions Bernie Sanders	25%	19.1%
Mentions Ted Cruz	13%	9.5%
Mentions both Cruz and Sanders in the same article	3%	0.5%
Does not mention non-leading candidates from major parties	59%	70.9%
Focuses more on Hillary Clinton	54%	50.8%
Focuses more on Donald Trump	27%	34.2%
Almost equal emphasis on both Clinton and Trump	9%	4%

The research period was divided into two phases – a month before December 20, 2015 (phase I), and the month subsequent to that (phase II) which marked the beginning of news coverage on the primaries. The shifts in language and discourse in traditional news were quite palpable. Whereas 11% of stories deviated from the conventional news style in the phase I, as much as 58% of news stories deviated from the conventions during phase II. This was most noticeable among the news articles - as opposed to regular features or opinion pieces - which had an almost six times increase in the language deviation. Prior to December 15, only 5% of news articles had various components that indicated the pattern, whereas after that date, the figure stood at 28%.

As the bar chart below (Figure 2) demonstrates, there was a sudden spike of news articles that deviated from the norm towards the beginning of the primaries. Although it is not possible to exactly pinpoint the reasons for this, discourses in news stories often stem from the normative of opting for what are known as news values. According to Yopp, McAdams and Thornburg (2010), traditional news values become second nature to journalists and they depend on them to build leads. They include "prominence, timeliness, proximity, impact, magnitude, conflict, oddity, and emotional impact. Several of them are allied to the elements who, what, when, where, how, and why" (p. 118).

*Figure 2: **Shifts in coverage:** Number of articles departing from conventional news style before and after Mid-December, 2015*

Anchor of Blog or Article=News Article, Type of Publication=Daily Newspaper

before and after middec
- 1.00
- 2.00

Count

Language Departs From Conventional News Style
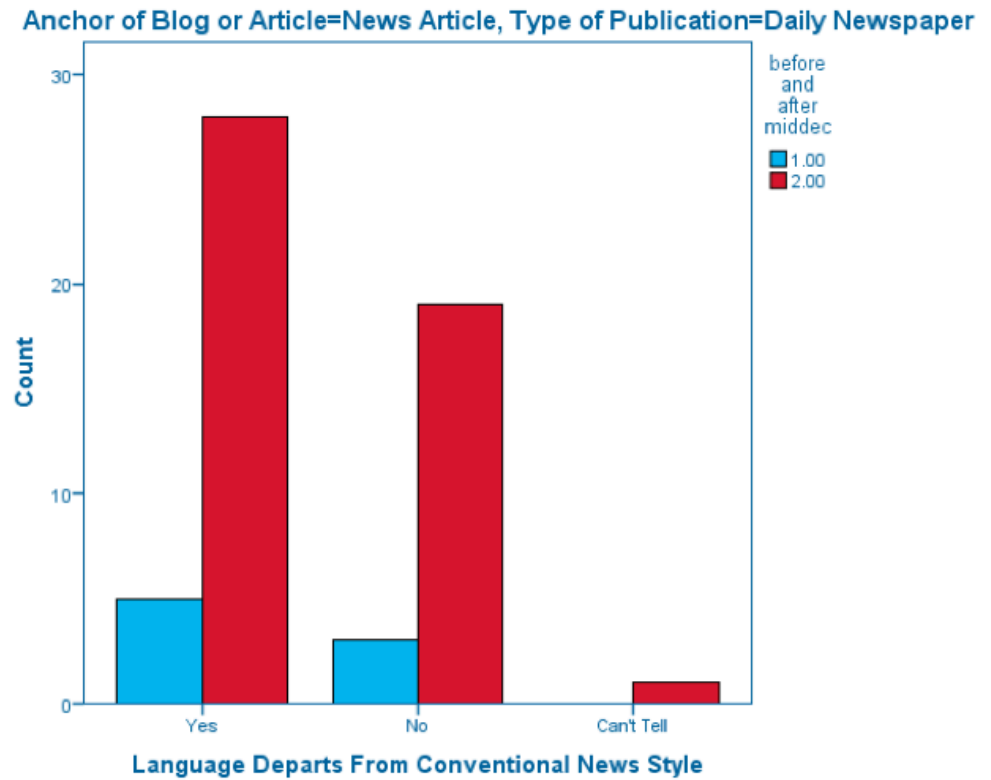
The topicality therefore affects the direction of discourse. Specific instances of burning topics that took place during the research phase included Donald Trump releasing his statement on preventing Muslim immigration (December 7, 2015), and tweeting how Bill Clinton had a penchant for sexism (December 26, 2015). Not only did the blogosphere go berserk, newspapers also followed suit. The level of engagement was qualitatively different when it came to covering attacks in Paris vis-à-vis bombings in Lebanon a few weeks prior, in the month of November.

The qualitative change was reflected in the language/discourse, however.

Whereas ample coverage was predicted with many such events possessing immense news values (such as timeliness and prominence, in cases of the Trump tweets), what can be noticed from the analyzed data are the blatant violations of cardinal journalistic norms when it came to traditional news coverage.

Whereas blogs are assumed to be free of gatekeeper influences, and are shaped by individual author's prerogatives, newspaper data are highly pre-structured and selective (Baumgarten & Grauel, 2009). Even as many differences between bloggers and journalists "are one of degree" (Hudson & Temple, 2010), newsgathering activity often distinguishes them, since owing to lack of financial incentives it has been considered a "routine for journalists, rare for bloggers" (Lowrey, 2006). However, as the days for primary elections approached, sensational and confrontational news started to occupy more space within the traditional media and started to take a form of their own. It seemed almost as if the blogosphere with their endless rants and mud-slinging interface were holding a torch for the traditional media to follow them on a journey of no-return.

Format Analysis

The majority of stories sampled from daily newspapers (37%) still retained an inverted pyramid structure even as the deviation was most notable in case of increasing amount of commentaries (31%) that are allowed in the newspaper's news sections. This was comparatively less among the blogosphere articles, with only 13.6% of commentaries, where unstructured informal expressions comprised majority of stories (33.7%).

*Table 4: **Format of news** - Percentages of stories in daily newspapers and blogs according to format. Chi-square analysis shows statistical significance at p ≤ 0.05*

Hallmark	Daily newspaper (N=100)	Blogs of all kinds (N=200)
Inverted pyramid news story	37%	27%
Rambling informal expressions	17%	33.7%
Sidebar to major story	3%	2%
Referencing external links	2%	7.5%
Recap of today's news	1%	1.5%
Commentary	31%	13.6%
None of the Above	9%	14%

Gender and Media Representation

With Hillary Clinton as the leading candidate of the Democratic party, the content and tone of reporting in both the traditional media and the blogosphere suggested sexism. This tension was also quite evident in the 2008 Presidential election campaign when Clinton first ran for a nomination. Clinton had been then mocked for her laughter and noticed for her cleavage. Joan Vennochi of the Boston Globe had called out the sexism in media with an opening line in her essay titled, "That Clinton

cackle" (2007): "Hens cackle. So do witches. And, so does the front-runner in the Democratic presidential contest."[76]

Ashleigh Crowther in her essay "Sexist language in media coverage of Hillary Clinton" (2007) wrote, "The media's depictions of Senator Clinton exhibit pervasive, sexist attitudes. Media outlets go beyond critiquing and reporting on Clinton as a candidate, instead choosing to highlight the fact that she is female using negative feminine stereotypes. If Clinton is to be criticized, she should be criticized on a level playing field with her male peers, without charged language or fairy-tale imagery."[77]

Fast-forward eight years, and not much seems to have changed. Sexism in media is alive and well. This time around, Clinton's role as a wife has been made an example of – she was accused of being an enabler to the sex scandals attributed to Bill Clinton.

One article from *Washington Post* read: "Until Trump turned his outsized media spotlight to Bill Clinton's past sexual behavior, the issue had largely receded to the darker corners of the Internet, although it had continued to percolate."

In a scathing commentary suitably titled, "When fair game is foul play", a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist for the Washington Post wrote:

> What does any of this have to do with Clinton? She isn't, after all, a guilty party. Then again, one is judged in part by the company one keeps. The question of character isn't always "what did you do?" but "what were you

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[76] Vennochi, J. (2007, September 30). That Clinton cackle. *The Boston Globe*, Retrieved from http://archive.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2007/09/30/that _clinton_cackle/
[77] Crowther, A. (2007, December 12). Sexist language in media coverage of Hillary Clinton. *Media Crit*, Retrieved from http://mediacrit.wikifoundry.com/page/Sexist+Language+in+Media+Coverage+of+H illary+Clinton

willing to tolerate?".... (For all her) achievements to be tarnished by Trump is unfair, and one might say, Clintonesque. If chickens really do come home to roost, the Clintons can't pretend to be bystanders to the idiom. It is a fact of recent history that women's rights have been selectively defended by Hillary Clinton's vast left-wing support group, especially when it has come to her husband's extramarital proclivities....Whether one stands on these histories, a double standard is undeniable. This is what Trump hinted at – and what Hillary Clinton will have to navigate as she seeks to convince voters not only that she deserves to live once again in the White House but also that her husband does as well.

Another article by a Pulitzer nominee for the *Post* echoed same sentiments: "What is the relevance of Bill Clinton's conduct for Hillary Clinton's campaign? Ordinarily, I would argue that the sins of the husband should not be visited on the wife....But Hillary Clinton has made two moves that lead me, gulp, to agree with Trump on the 'fair game' front. She is (smartly) using her husband as a campaign surrogate, and simultaneously (correctly) calling Trump sexist."

The New York Times in an article headlined "The juicy subplots of 2016" made reference to what it called "Clinton's marital psychodrama" after saying Bill Clinton was "on the loose".

On the blog editions of prominent publications, there were even more references to the scandal. Washington Post Blog *"Right Turn"* calling it "1998 all over again" read: "It's ironic that at the time liberals on college campuses are seeking to make every young man's sexual advances grounds for complaint, Bill Clinton is gallivanting around the campaign trail."

In many stories in blogosphere, sexism is noticeably apparent throughout the texts starting from the headline. One entry was headlined "#YouCruzYouLose: Ted Cruz thinks Hillary Clinton should be spanked." The article while critical of Cruz, went

on to analyze, "In the not-so-distant past, images of men spanking grown women to punish them for the smallest of household infractions were used to sell legitimate items to the public in mainstream advertising."

*Table 5: **Gender Bias** – Percentages of stories in traditional press and blog that discuss women's rights issues and Bill Clinton's sex scandal*

Hallmark	Traditional News in Sample (N=100)	Blogs of all kinds in Sample (N=200)
Mentions women's rights issues	27%	21.6%
Deals with Bill Clinton's sex scandal	15%	16.6%

Where the blog/story mentions women's issues, 72.9% of those stories also mention Bill Clinton sex scandal. This could imply either that there is a sexist tendency to put the onus of Bill Clinton's behavior patterns on Hillary Clinton, or on the more positive side, this trend could also suggest that issues of sexual harassment are no longer being brushed aside if they affect powerful politicians.

That aside, there are noticeable forms of sexist writings in mainstream press that reflect the blogosphere. Phrases and sentences like these appear throughout traditional press, when they are bereft of the Bill Clinton context - "Donald is

something and all other politicians are pantywaists", "poor Hillary Clinton", and "she pathetically clings to President Obama".

This form of writing could also be attributable to the finding that only 32.9% of all reports that address women's issues were authored by male reporters/bloggers - which is nearly half of the coverage that women authors accorded (58.6%) to women's issues. According to Table 6, in case of 8.6% of those articles, the gender of author could not be determined. Moreover, only 70 out of 300 surveyed articles were found to have covered women's issues, ranging from reproductive rights to equal pay and glass ceiling phenomenon.

*Table 6: **Women's Issues** - Percentages of articles that deal with women's issues as covered by the gender.*

Gender of lead author	Coverage of women's issues (N=70)
Woman	58.6%
Man	32.9%
Not clear	8.6%

What is apparent from Table 7 below is that in spite of a comparable population of women bloggers and reporters contributing to the articles under research, sexist undertones and sensational stories remained unabated, while issues core to women remained largely underreported.

*Table 7: **Gender of lead author** - Percentages of articles authored across newspapers and blogosphere, indicated by gender*

Gender of lead author	Daily Newspapers (N=100)	Syndicated Blogs (N=200)
Woman	39%	47.7%
Man	51%	51.3%
Not clear	10%	1%

So far as the leading candidates were concerned, one fascinating finding could be reached by cross-tabulating the number of times politicians were addressed by first name (as a parameter of informal language that departs from norms) with locating of which leading candidate was the article more focused on (Table 8).

*Table 8: **Candidate Focus** - Percentages of articles with candidate focus that also had the leading candidate called by first name (cross-tabulated)*

Candidate focus	Percentage of times candidate was called by first name
More about Hillary Clinton	68%
More about Donald Trump	16%
Almost equal emphasis	4%
Neither	12%

Under study were articles that highlighted some *trending* stories of that time period. Remarkably enough newspapers covered the issues at more depth and frequency than the blogosphere. As Table 9 indicates, in terms of women's issues, traditional media covered them 5.4% more, ISIS and terrorism issues were found there in 14.4% more instances, gun control issue was found nearly four times more in newspapers; immigration stories as well as Muslim ban stories were more extensively covered in newspapers than blogs; financial status of candidates and release of emails controversy were also covered more in newspapers. The only issue that blogs covered more than the traditional press was that of Bill Clinton's sex scandal.

Table 9: **Trending Issues** *- Percentages of articles based on trending issues*

Issues	Daily Newspapers	Syndicated Blogs
Women's issues	27%	21.6%
ISIS or terrorism	42%	27.6%
Gun control	30%	8.5%
Immigration	38%	27.6%
Ban on Muslims	33%	28.1%
Release of emails	8%	3.5%
Finances of candidates	27%	13.6%
Bill Clinton sex scandal	15%	16.6%

When we narrow it down to only the two leading professional titles under study, the results that follow tell contrasting tales. To begin with, as Table 10 suggests, reporters were more likely to adhere to inverted pyramid news style (59.6%) compared to bloggers (26.9%). Unstructured informal expressions were more associated with the bloggers (33.8%) compared to the reporters (15.8%).

Table 10: **Professional title & Style** - Percentages of stories by bloggers and reporters that show particular hallmarks of style. Chi-square analysis shows statistical significance at p ≤ 0.05

Hallmark	Reporter	Blogger
Inverted pyramid news story	59.6%	26.9%
Unstructured informal expressions	15.8%	33.8%
Commentaries	14%	27%
Sidebar to major story	3.5%	2%
Referencing external links	1.8%	16%
Recap of today's news	1.8%	1.5%
None of the above	3.5%	14.4%

Likewise, professionally more bloggers were found making personal references compared to the reporters. Social issues were found significantly more within newspaper stories. As Table 11 indicates, whereas bloggers covered social issues around 32.3% of times, newspaper reporters were found covering them 61.4% of times. The reason why this discrepancy is not immediately discernible on Table 9 is because the number of social issues outlined there was not exhaustive. Many newspaper reports also covered other social issues that were not coded – they include topics such as Planned Parenthood and healthcare, wage gap and labor union, climate change, race relations, and LGBT issues. In terms of personal attacks, references were also made to internment of Japanese-Americans, Nazi Germany, and McCarthyism. Commentaries were also made on pattern of media reporting and political humor.

*Table 11: **Social and personal issues** - Percentages of stories covered by Bloggers and Reporters categorized by social issues and personal references. Chi-square analysis shows statistical significance at p ≤ 0.05*

Hallmark	Reporter	Blogger
Social issues	61.4%	32.3%
Personal references	21.1%	52.7%
Both	17.5%	9%

This leads to the final analysis of the extent to which bloggers and reporters departed from conventional news style. As Table 12 suggests there is a sharp contrast

– almost 75.1% of all stories written by bloggers appeared to be somewhat deviating from established norms, whereas 56.1% of articles written by reporters were found to be in similar zone.

*Table 12: **Professional title & Language** - Percentages of stories departing from conventional news style, based on writings by bloggers and reporters alone. Chi-square analysis shows statistical significance at p ≤ 0.05*

Hallmark	Reporter	Blogger
Language Departs from Conventional news style	56.1%	75.1%
Language does not depart from conventional news style	42.1%	23.9%
Can't tell	1.8%	1.0%

<u>*Interactivity Elements*</u>

Analyzing interactivity elements was not possible simply by going through the print versions of the newspaper articles. Therefore, for this section alone, the online versions of the print articles were compared with the blog articles, as retrieved online. Following results on Table 13 indicate that blogosphere remained the favorite destination for advertisers. It also was most suitable for sharing of videos. Apart from that, bloggers engaged through hyperlinking way more – almost five times more – than their traditional newsroom counterparts. Blog articles were more likely to embed Tweets into the stories as well. This trend remained a constant in both phases of

tabulating most included and second most included interactivity elements. Likewise,

blog platforms included more than twice the amount of polls and statistics compared to

the online news versions of print publications.

Table 13: **Interactivity Elements** *- Percentages of interactivity elements across newspaper and blog articles*

Hallmark	Newspapers	Blogs
Interactivity elements (most included) -		
Links	12%	60.8%
Tweets	3%	21.6%
Ads	2%	10.1%
Videos	4%	7%
Interactivity elements (second most included) -		
Links	4%	24.1%
Tweets	0%	5%
Ads	4%	53.3%
Videos	1%	5.5%
Polls and Statistics included	7%	15.6%

Beyond the Data Analysis – Body and the Headline

New Words

A textual analysis of articles also points to findings that simply could not have been contained within the tables above. A detailed study of the articles during this period shows for instance, how new words were made up or/and used abundantly by reporters and bloggers alike. A term "Hispandering" found its way into the journalistic lexicon when *Huffington Post* reported on race relations of Hillary Clinton. On December 22, 2015, Clinton's campaign team created a list titled "7 ways Hillary Clinton is Just Like Your Abuela", and the blogosphere took notice of people across social media not being too happy with the list. It gave rise to not just "Hispandering" as a new political phenomenon which *Huffington Post* circulated, but also #NotMyAbuela as a trending hashtag concurrently that was picked up by the *Washington Post Blogs*, the next day. *Post*'s headline read: "#NotMyAbuela: Hillary Clinton offends some with 'grandma' pitch to Latinos; "You should fire the person who thought up that awful marketing campaign," a critic said." A rather too long headline for a *Washington Post* article, but it clearly passed the litmus test for its blog page.

A new word "Ameritude" was circulated by *Huffington Post* blog on January 14, 2016. In a story headlined, "Hey Trump, You Know Who Else Held Rallies Where Kids Sang About Crushing Their Enemies?", Huffington Post blogger referred to "a trio of patriotically clad little girls" dancing at a Donald Trump rally and he reported, "Moments later, the girls used the word "Ameritude" which as far as Google is concerned had never been used before. History in the making."

Adjectives for Candidates

Words named after leading politicians of the season that widely circulated within the blogosphere also quickly found their way into the mainstream press. For Hillary Clinton, it was "Clintonesque": A *Washington Post* blogger used it to imply that someone was being unfairly treated. For Donald Trump, it was "Trumpism". A blogger eloquently described this phenomenon: "Trump's rise has occasioned a debate between two sets of political actors who approach the subject with a sort of certainty that borders on panic, the exact combination of traits that signals to outsiders that some sort of epistemological crisis is ongoing. Both groups believe that Trumpism is, for lack of a better word, a passing fad." For President Obama, the word was "Obamasque": This word of course was found in the print edition of the *New York Times*, where the reporter wrote, "Everything is connected. Which is why the presidency is for grown-ups, not rank outsiders. Some of Clinton's specific prescriptions were a little too limited and Obamasque for my taste."

"Socialist hellhole" is what Obama had made the United States into, wrote one blogger. The word "narcissism" made several rounds as well, including most notably on this blog headline: "The politics of Narcissism Drooling Idiocy, Cont'd". Not far behind in creative English was the phrase "Gutter Politics" that found many mentions, including on the headline of a blog which read, "Hillary Clinton: Target of gutter politics, sexism and Clinton Derangement Syndrome?"

Ableist Words

Ableism was rife across traditional press and the blogosphere. Not just limited to "idiocy" and "derangement" as cited above, but also sentences such as "Of course,

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he is saying odious as well as moronic things," or lines such as "half-tipsy celebrity blathers on about his stupid co-stars", and phrases such as "these lame excuses" and "what crazy thing did Trump/Obama/…say now". A *Washington Post* headline read that a show "made up a bunch of crazy things about the GOP".

Aggressive Words

Aggressive confrontational tone of articles could not be complete without actual uses of exemplifying words. Thus words like "spar" appeared on the headline – "Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton Spar over Banks"; "bristle" appeared in the intro of another story, "Hillary Clinton bristled at the term 'radical Islam' during Saturday's Democratic presidential primary debate"; "squabble" found itself a few times, including in intro of another, "Prompted by the horror of the terrorist attacks in Paris Friday night, the Democratic candidates for president squabbled during their debate on Saturday"; "vulgar" was another – it was used in a headline of a *New York Times* blog post - "Donald Trump goes vulgar in swipe at Hillary Clinton"; "trash" as in, "Borat crashes…to trash Donald Trump"; "throw" as in, "Donald Trump is ready to thrown down with Hillary Clinton"; "tangle" as in, "Team Trump tangles with the press". One of the most used words in this genre unsurprisingly was "mocked", a factual instance of which was of course that "Donald Trump mocked Hillary Clinton for using the bathroom during Democratic presidential debate"; words such as "flopped" too found their ways in – "Hillary Clinton can't help herself…the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee flopped again."

Headlines in Battleground

Headlines are often the most unique selling proposition of any article to invite the audience in, and the blogosphere seems to have mastered the art, going by the samples under the current study. This is a constant regardless of whether the blog is associated to a mainstream media or it is a freestanding weblog. Among those blogs that were being run by the traditional press, some headlines read as follows:

"Chris Christie says Hillary Clinton would cut Marco Rubio's heart out"

"Donald Trump goes vulgar in swipe at Hillary Clinton"

"What do we want Hillary Clinton – to do about her husband"

"Hillary Clinton does the dab and another dance craze bites the dust"

"The Bill Clinton scandal machine revs back up and takes aim at his wife"

"If you think Bill's past is 'fair game', tell us why, please"

"Please ignore general election polling (except ours)"

"Hillary Clinton invoked 9/11 to defend her ties to Wall Street. What?"

"Danger, Hillary Clinton, Danger!"

"Jeb Bush ad calls Donald Trump a jerk like this has not been the selling point of his whole campaign"

"The problem with the Donald Trump pink rug theory; Or: Why Donald Trump can win."

"The media knows exactly how to deal with Donald Trump's constant lying; Debunk it and move on."

"Cowardly and inept Republican elites play into Trump's hands"

Headlines in blog articles contained phrases like "Trump is an A**hole", "I don't give a F**k about Donald Trump", "White people don't F**k with Trump", "Hillary Clinton has no time for Bullsh*t about the gender card", "…has already pissed off U.S. allies", "That kind of crap is not going to work in the United States", "Hey Trump, you know who else…", "Comedians…make The Donald their pet monkey", "Donald Trump's sons think their dad can totally beat up your dad", and "Trump is not a blowhard, he's dangerous".

Headlines also contained sexist phrases - "…campaign slogan just got a gay makeover", "Donald Trump's tampon brand will make your vagina great again", "Bill 'serial sexual assaulter' Clinton to stump for victimizer wife Hillary".

Other headlines in blogosphere ran: "Trump says he wouldn't kill reporters", "Here's the dirty little secret of Marco Rubio's campaign", "Ted Cruz is too slick. And a narcissist", "There's a chance Donald Trump would have supported Japanese internment", "Democratic drama as curtain rises on New Hampshire debate", "Donald Trump gets Hitler treatment in Atlanta street art", among others.

Traditional press (print versions alone) wasn't far behind in their headline skills. Although not as salacious or sensational, they were preachy and conclusive nevertheless, and due to limited space in their layouts, short, and at times, incomplete -

"Trump is right: Bill is fair game"

"Condemn extremists, together"

"Why Cruz is more dangerous"

"Donald Trump's bigoted base"

"Donald Trump"

"What are all the options?"

"Its fair game to play the Bill card against Hillary"

Unexpected Findings

Race discourse, which played a primary talking point during past electoral campaigns, was found lacking in substantive coverage this phase. Apart from occasional talks about Hillary Clinton's "Hispandering", or the rise of Black Lives Matter, there was nothing significant in the news reports about racial dynamics of the American society. More crucially absent was any assessment of President Obama's balance sheet vis-à-vis race relations in the United States. Very little coverages were accorded to other social justice issues – gay rights and disability challenges.

Absolutely lackluster reporting on the issues raised by the "third parties", and coverages of those parties themselves were also astounding. Even within the dominant parties, there was diminishing coverages of non-leading candidates as the time for the primaries neared; although that did coincide with the shift in coverages of sensational stories associated with the leading candidates.

One unexpected finding was the length of headlines. Many reports, especially in the blogosphere, had too lengthy headlines. For instance, one headline read - "Donald Trump accuses Bill Clinton of a 'terrible record of women abuse'; This month Donald Trump showed that he's not afraid to go, well, anywhere when it comes to attacking Hillary Clinton."

Gender of lead authors was intriguing as well, albeit positively. The blogosphere and traditional media alike were very well represented by women. My assumption prior to undertaking this research – based on gender visibility of leading journalists and bloggers on social media - was that, there would be substantially less number of women in this circus of covering political mud-slinging.

Comment moderation was another finding worth mentioning. Not only was the blogosphere encouraging comments, the traditional press was not far behind at all in this area. However, what was surprising is that the traditional press appeared to be moderating the comments more, notably in two ways: 1) comments were subjected to a process of approval, and hence removal as well, when they violated a policy, 2) certain comments were picked or recommended or up-voted by the editors or the readers themselves. The process of adjudication remained unclear across publications.

Determining the format of a story was far more difficult in the blogosphere. Due to the unconventional presentation of paragraphs, it was not immediately perceptible whether a story was a news article or a commentary. On many occasions, they were, indeed, both.

Although it was expected somewhat that the blog articles do not necessarily follow a style sheet nor do they pay special attention to syntax rules, the spelling mistakes and poor editing of copies were way too frequently observed to be given a pass. At times, a sentence began with a quote, but did not have an end quote. A headline even contained a meaningless syllable.

Coding of the story length helped find out that the blogs ran longer than newsprint articles. This could possibly hint at the blogosphere providing an outlet for

journalists to go beyond their prescribed word limits which are customary at news desks. This is incidental a finding but reinforces a key distinction between blog posts and news articles.

The blogs associated with major publications followed unique styles. For instance, the *New York Times Blogs* appeared with a "Highlight" section above the intro that summarized the story to help the readers in deciding whether or not to proceed with the piece. This is in continuation with a blogosphere tradition of direct interaction with the audience. Likewise, the *Huffington Post Blogs* offered a helping hand right after the story ended, with the following: "Do you have information you want to share with the Huffington Post? Here's how." Also available was a section on blog articles titled "Suggest a correction" – to encourage reader participation in editing process of the article.

Another surprise finding was how some articles changed headlines once they were published. For the traditional press, print edition of many articles had different headline compared to their online versions. This could possibly be due to lifted restrictions of space constraint on the Internet. But even the articles exclusively found in the blogosphere underwent changes in headlines in due course of time. It was of course literally an incidental discovery, on the occasions I revisited the stories to cite sources. For instance, on the *Huffington Post*, one headline for a story originally retrieved on the day of publication read: "Dyson: Hillary's White Privilege Could Make Her A Better 'Black' President". When I revisited it a month later, the headline had changed to a more accurate one - "Michael Eric Dyson: Hillary's White Privilege Will Make Her A Better President For Black Americans". Upon examining the story, I found

Michael Eric Dyson had not in fact said that Hillary Clinton would make a "better Black President". So, the correction of headline was necessitated. Likewise, a *New York Times* story that had the headline, "Skittish over terrorism, some voters seek a gutsy style leader" on print, had it changed on the online version to, "Voters, Worried About Terrorism, Look for Leaders at Home on Silver Screen". Whereas the traditional press acknowledged this discrepancy in headlines by means of a small disclaimer below the article online, the blogosphere tended to overlook the need to list such amendments.

In another finding, identity of journalists and bloggers appeared to be more vague than I had originally imagined them to be. Although the political identities (such as, liberal, conservative, libertarian, etc.) of reporters and bloggers were chronicled by others, it was only on rare occasions that they self-identified themselves as belonging to one of these categories.

Images, too, comprised a surprise finding. In articles on print where photographs were amiss, they were present on their online versions. One article had as many as 24 pictures on its online rendition. Pictures often were picked to go with the sentiment of the main story, rather than coinciding with the event itself. For instance, one story that was making predictions about Democratic Party debate did not have a photo about the venue or of the moderators. Instead, there was an unflattering image of Hillary Clinton.

In the following and the last chapter, I am going to draw conclusions upon the analyzed data, to articulate the key findings. I shall also list out the limitations of the current work, as well as propose implications for the future studies.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

"Any current curse word can become a word of praise, any current truth must inevitably sound to other people as the greatest lie. This inner dialectical quality of the sign comes out fully in the open only in times of social crises or revolutionary changes" – Volosinov (1929).

The 2016 U.S. Presidential elections marked one of the most visible manifestations of social crises in American society. The privacy rights of citizens, a proposed ban on a major world religion, public ridicule of women and the disabled, and blatant denial of climate concerns – were just some of the many values that got invoked through fiery debates on and off the media. Along with this arrived the multi-accented nature of the media texts. Curse and praise, lie and truth got obfuscated. Language – and by extension the medium of its publication – did not appear to remain confined to be interpreted as natural signs – it turned into a socially constructed sign-system. Metaphors, slangs, curses, informal ramblings and subjective rants flooded a media industry, which was by no means innocent thus far, but its vulnerability to be exploited by proverbial gatekeepers, and interpreted in a multiple ways by an informed audience, was exposed even all the more, this electoral season.

The context of the present study began with a reference to explication as described by the eminent media scholar Steven Chaffee. Through explication as an intellectual process applied to "a concept one intends to make focus of planned research" (Chaffee, 1991), I undertook a critical examination of the media writing during the pre-primary duration of Presidential elections of 2016. To that extent, the

present study focused on the possible impacts an irreverent blogosphere was having upon a sacrosanct traditional press, as surveyed through textual analysis of published articles. Specifically, the study purported to trace commonalities and differences between the two genre of media writing, at an interesting phase that led to a memorable election year.

It did not aspire to pin down the effects of the discourse, however. Did the media texts directly result in the election of Donald Trump? I could not tell. For one, the voters would have to be the readers of the same texts that I ended up surveying before the effects could be analyzed. Secondly, even if they were the consumers of those texts, their ability to negotiate the texts would vary depending on their respective social locations.

Revisiting Social Locations

Here is a time I can afford to veer into my own, before resuming the critique of media research traditions which helped me explicate the phenomena of blogging and political journalism –

I had formal (post)graduate training at the journalism school run by the Government of India in New Delhi before I joined mainstream English-language dailies as a staff writer. Whereas the applied aspects of journalism in the newsroom were uncomplicated, namely, the style of writing (inverted pyramid, how to create compelling intro and headline), and the journalistic norms (media ethics, laws, verifications and reliance on authoritative sources), we were also educated on the traditions of media research and press theories advanced by stalwarts such as Wilbur Schramm. UNESCO guided our curriculum on occasions and India's role in forming a

Non-aligned News Pool with an aim to create a parallel narrative for the underrepresented third world during and in the aftermath of Cold War remained at forefront of communication research. I was influenced by both of those old-school philosophies – sticking to the hegemonic style sheet, and at the same time, understanding how the style and the news flow became institutionalized.

I would like to believe there was a merit in grasping that contradiction. It enables journalists in the newsroom to be aware of not just what and how they need to report so they do not disturb the sanctity of news upon which there exists a reposed collective trust, but also to remain constantly aware of the need to air grievances, professional angst and discomfort when the occupational values clash against engagements with causes of social justice.

This desperation to go beyond journalism to make a more tangible impact on social policies made many in the profession, politicians in the developing economies. As a matter of fact, many anti-colonial freedom fighters in India who helped secure independence for the country were great journalists of their times. They were also great diarists. Mahatma Gandhi who was certainly not an exception in this regard, was a firebrand reporter, a newspaper editor. He even had a personal diarist for those times his words could not see the print.

Another diarist who influenced the way I looked at journalism from the yesteryears was the great American poet Langston Hughes, whose work "I Wonder as I Wander" was a resounding vindication of reflective writing. It was no surprise, however, as Hughes was not just a poet who catered to various tastes, but also a political observer whose progressive views did not find adequate outlets during his time.

In my personal life, I witnessed my father Sri Subhas Chandra Pattanayak remaining at the forefront of professional journalism for three decades before realizing that many of his articles could not see the light of day in view of frequent clashes with the newspaper management. In 2001, he launched his own weblog and was recognized through accreditation as the first web journalist of my state, Odisha, India (Chatterjee, 2013).

Drawing from my own life ideals and inspirations, I quit mainstream journalism (from my stint at *Hindustan Times*), and started working on my own blog from 2002, co-founded an online political journal *Radical Notes* in 2005, and resumed my romance with the print through writing cover stories for a small-scale monthly magazine published from Kolkata titled, *Kindle*, which I joined since its launch in 2008. This was my way of remaining in tune with blogging, online journalism and print media all at the same time.

Throughout, what occupied my research for the longest time was an interest in understanding this eagerness – including my own – for the professionally trained journalists to explore blogging as an alternative vehicle for information dissemination. In 2006, I set out to find the answers from the new bloggers in Washington DC region, with an overarching research question, *Why journalists blog?* I found no easy answers through the surveys and in-depth interviews but they informed my outlook and enriched my academic reflexes. Empirically, the answers ranged from the hope to earn extra revenues, to locating in blogs a channel to externalize pent-up emotions. For my friend and alumnus of the Merrill College, journalist and scholar Dr. Todd S. Burroughs whose *Drums in the Global Village* blog has been running successfully for the past

decade, it was a mix of many elements. Without going into the interviews themselves, I am going to quote directly from his blog post (Burroughs, 2006) below aptly titled, *"I Said I Was Not Going To Be A Blogger…"*:

> "…..but when Saswat asked me to think about this, I couldn't resist. Hello. I'm Todd Steven Burroughs, your host. This blog will do what blogs do: give you a running thread of my public (sub)conscious. So that means lots of talk about Black media, superhero comicbooks, Black superheroes, superhero movies and superhero cartoons, Doctor Who (old and new), Star Trek, and whatever else crosses my info-addled mind that consistently demands release.."

Ten years and 1,670 posts later, the *Drums* blog is still going strong. In its voracious explorations lies its strength. I wondered if the blogger was then more than a journalist – maybe a *generalist,* who has eclectic tastes so far as opinions go. Maybe that distinguished the bloggers from the traditional journalists - not necessarily as the individuals themselves, but certainly in their professed capacities.

Coping with a diverse array of expertise that a blogger may exhibit in lack of traditional restrictions on their writing is an uneasy proposition for any audience. In a sense, the intent of the blogger is perhaps just as indiscernible as the ability of the audience to decode the published texts. *Why journalists blog* was a question that offered just about as incomplete an answer, as what impacts do the blogs have on the audience.

Negotiating the Interpretations

Intent of the blogger may in fact have nothing to do with understanding by an audience. The moment one presupposes the effects a blog post has on an electoral result, the complications of such a claim far outweigh the veracity of it. As tempting as it may seem to find value in one's research work as a determinant to the eventual outcome of a major event, it is more boisterous than veridical. Studying effects is

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critical to offering a more useful and gratifying option for the audience when there exists less than an ideal media produce. But beyond that utilitarian aspect, it offers nothing to note the underlying systematic prefiguration of media biases. This is why language, especially during politically charged times, works as a complex signs system mediated by dominant narrators.

Textual analysis helps take note of this complexity by using empirical and longitudinal data – as I have in this study – but avoids the trap of isolating the codes alone as the basis of reaching conclusions. Whereas I have employed variables and coded them to facilitate findings, I have brought in my years of experience as a journalist and blogger, and utilized various theoretical lenses to study those findings. The reason to leave out effects and audience research was deliberate owing to my agreement with Stewart Hall's (1973) interpretation below -

> To "misread" a political choice as a technical one represents a type of unconscious collusion to which social science researchers are all too prone. Though the sources of such mystification are both social and structural, the actual process is greatly facilitated by the operation of discrepant codes. It would not be the first time that scientific researchers had "unconsciously" played a part in the reproduction of hegemony, not only by openly submitting to it, but by simply operating the "professional bracket".

This is where lies the fluidity of curse-praise dichotomy as Volosinov, above, referred to. Language is not bereft of the social setting of the given time. Words by themselves carry little implication – it is the way they are interpreted within a socio-historic context that brings them new meanings, no matter how impermanent. Therefore when Bill Clinton sex scandal is extensively covered prior to the primary, that by itself – the frequency of that code – is not indicative of a virtue or a vice in media reporting. For one set of audience, it could be a wrong thing to invoke since a wife should not be

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penalized on grounds of her husband's misdeeds. For another set of audience, it could be a groundbreaking thing to not remain silent when the powerful become the assaulters and hence it becomes imperative that their friends and families are called out for being accomplices or silent witnesses. This interpretive power on part of the audience to validate or invalidate the intent of an author functions independently. Especially for the marginalized segments of population who are not adequately represented in the media, this is what empowers them. This is where Hall shines and informs my study, to go beyond the texts and notice the pattern between media producers and their audience - which he used to call, a form of "systematically distorted communication" (Hall, 1973).

Medium is the Massage

Once the negotiation of texts is understood in context, and consequential insights are derived at through explication, there is value in acknowledging the unique characteristics of the medium that shaped the message, or to invoke Marshall McLuhan, *massaged* the message. McLuhan (1952) theorized in his essay, "Technology and Political Change", that more important than marveling at the technological advancements in media world is the need to acknowledge the *mechanization of speech* itself -

> By way of obeisance to our own ingenuity, people have often felt obliged to marvel at radio and television by exclaiming: "Although it's happening over there, it's also happening right here." This kind of self-hypnosis is undertaken in a spirit of uneasy propitiation of the new god. But the real power of these deities is exerted when we aren't looking. The mechanization of speech meant that the most intimate whispers of the most ordinary tones of conversation could be sent everywhere instantly from anywhere….Radio meant the widest dispersal of the human voice and also the ultimate dispersal of attention. For listening is not hearing anymore than looking is reading. And all the networks

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of human communication are becoming so jammed that very few messages are reaching their destination. Mental starvation in the midst of plenty is as much a feature of mass communication as of mass production.

Mass production and archiving of media content across Internet is so vast, it is little wonder that when the messages make sense, they do so not in a directed manner, but via entirely unique configurations. The journalist/blogger may hope for the readers to read in a certain manner of uninterrupted sequence, but the active reader may end up clicking an external link within the text and get distracted, or refuse to engage with the story if it moderates comments by requiring a sign-up, or if the page has too many ads, and so on. More importantly, perhaps the *decoding* of article takes unpredictable twist when the author structures the article to make it more interactive for the audience to lure them to stay on longer for the advertising gains – this is where the medium itself becomes the message in a McLuhanisque manner.

"Massaging" also takes effect in ways that the blogosphere becomes rife with unique characteristics it has come to be known for – informal words, first person narratives, as well as elements such as statistics, polls, graphics, images and commenting.

Key Findings

Many unexpected and incidental findings were listed in the previous chapter discussing data analysis. But what about the key findings and do they answer all the research questions as outlined at the outset of this study? My conclusion is they do, and I shall elaborate why –

While undertaking this research the primary question was if there were noticeable shifts in language and discourse of traditional news that seem to reflect the blogosphere during the time of research. The outcomes of this study were remarkable in this regard - irreverence permeated much of the traditional news articles; media writings by journalists reflected much of the blogosphere norms. The shift in this case studied longitudinally is impressive – as the heated debates ensued in the blogosphere, the amount and intensity of informal expressions shot up in traditional media. Ordinarily, this should have had no impact on the traditional press, considering that they have stakeholders who are accustomed to a certain standard of media writing. But as Figure 2 demonstrates, the shift in the language in traditional press was almost six times more during the second phase compared to the first. I studied this shift using not just arbitrary words taken out of context, but by paraphrasing unorthodox languages to keep them in perspective.

Whether this trend is upsetting, or not, depends on factors beyond the scope of this study. It is impossible to figure out if the trending topics were pursued with vigor because they were projected as important by the online interface, or they gained traction online after they were legitimized as hot topics once the print media took them up. But for the purpose of this study, suffice it to say that various styles of the blogosphere were found evident across the traditional media, which leads us to the next research question.

I had set out to study the changes in journalistic norms by comparing them with those of the blogs. In this case, although the blogosphere styles were surprisingly found among even the most esteemed of print publications, the amount of observable changes were not very discouraging. By and far, style principles (as depicted by Table 2) were

respected way more among the traditional press compared to the blogosphere. Almost three-fourth of newspaper articles stuck to traditional news style and refrained from addressing readers in first person. Only a small number of articles called politicians by their first name, although that still was an unpleasant surprise to me. An overwhelming portion of news articles refrained from using any slangs or profanities that are unsuitable for press, compared to the blog articles remaining clean of informal texts. Where it was comparable between both the media, they were largely quoting the politicians (such as when they were calling each other liars or making personal comments).

The third question had asked of the intersection between blogs and traditional journalism by means of their characteristics. Format of stories was a major consideration to explain the answers here. As Table 4 suggests, they intersected rather well, to the extent that blogs seem to have picked up the media writing principles from the world of journalism. Almost one-third of blog articles followed the inverted pyramid news story format. This might be explained by the rise of bloggers who are trying to position themselves as journalists and seeking accreditation nationwide. Another area where bloggers could surely benefit from their interaction with traditional press is the use of unstructured/informal expressions. This is where the newspapers do exceedingly well – only 17% of articles could be summarily categorized as informal texts. One interesting finding in format analysis is that even as blogs do not have space limits and are ideal platform for unbridled opinions, when it came to structured commentaries, they lagged way behind newspapers. Most worthwhile commentaries were found in traditional media and only 13.6% of stories in blogosphere appeared to

be cohesively put together commentaries. This could be explained of course by the fact that newspapers hire established authors and columnists to supply commentaries as a form of specialized writing. There is a difference between informal ramblings and structured opinions and the blogosphere has a lot to learn from traditional press in this regard.

Fourth research question sought to figure out the impacts of blogs on journalistic standards of objectivity. This could be determined by analyzing the standards themselves, in comparison to how most blog articles fared in the same areas. In journalistic terms, I was looking to find how they presented balanced perspectives. This is where it was disappointing to observe that neither traditional news reports nor blog articles even entertained any third-party narratives. There was a brief mention about a third political party in only one of the newspaper articles. I will discuss more on this while proposing implications towards the end of this chapter, but for the purpose of finding, it appeared as if both journalists and bloggers were influencing each other and were at an agreement with the tendency to overlook any political reporting of individuals who did not belong to the dominant parties.

Considering my own bias which was favorable toward a "third party" candidate at the time, I found it slightly unnerving to witness the chorus of indifference in exploring multiplicity of political formations, let alone the desire on part of a journalist to challenge what has been called a "tyranny of two-party system". Beyond the third party question, there were other ways I had coded my data to see if media reports were according comparable respect to the non-leading candidates from both the parties. Apparently not so much. Only Bernie Sanders and Ted Cruz managed to get some

decent coverage, but way less than half of what either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump received. As a principle of objectivity, the goal is usually to present both sides or multiple sides of the same discourse. In this case, only 9% of traditional news articles and only 4% of blog articles offered equal emphasis to both Clinton and Trump, let alone bringing in other candidates into the mix. Most of the times, a story was either singularly devoted to Trump, or to Clinton – almost unfortunately sending a signal of partisan coverage.

Fifth and final research question asked the ways the blogosphere influence was felt in the headlines and languages of non-blog journalism text. The blogosphere seems to have played to the gallery on this one - so much of sensational, offbeat and indeed bizarre headlines were discovered along the research path that it will become a Herculean task for the professional journalists to emulate the spirit entirely. Having said that, in traditional news articles too, there were several instances of informal headlines which prompted me a few times to recheck the source file.

Beyond the headlines though, traditional press began to show cracks – many articles bore resemblance to blog stories when it came to usage of certain words. There were plenty of ableist words, aggressive verbs, adjectives for candidates, and lots of made-up words, none of which are necessarily unsuitable or too informal for press, but definitely unconventional, and if I may, unprecedented.

Most visibly present was sexism in media texts, across traditional news stories and in the blog articles. Phrases describing the only leading woman presidential candidate were deeply problematic. Instead of focusing on Clinton's capacity to govern based on her past records, which could arguably be dubious or inefficient – almost all

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the articles that projected her negatively were relying solely on the Trump narrative of her being an enabler to her husband's misconducts. Better gender sensitization in newsrooms definitely looks like a welcome possibility for the future.

Tale of the Tally

One thing is for sure, blogs are here to stay. In fact, following 2016 presidential elections, the chair of a far-right blog found his way into the White House as its chief strategist, and the new President himself is using a micro-blogging platform to communicate with the public on a daily basis. Using both the blog and micro-blog, the opinion-makers are still engaging with critiquing mainstream media. So, in foreseeable future, there appears to be no existential threat to either journalism or blogging – in fact, with more journalists running their own blogs, the question has moved beyond the medium.

One corollary finding which was referred to in this study was the sheer popularity of blogs, compared to traditional media of all varieties. As Table 1 indicates, the top five liberal blogs in the US have a circulation figure of attracting 151.5 million unique monthly visitors. Likewise, the top five conservative blogs have a circulation figure exceeding 87.5 million unique monthly visitors.

The increasing worth in blogosphere is sustained via advertisements which in turn take into account the circulation. This circle, vicious or not, engulfs as its intrinsic consumers – both the reader and the producer, because far too often it is one and the same. The urge to update a blog, a Twitter feed, an Instagram profile is aimed at self-promotion no doubt (or promotion of an external product, book, or a movie among other things), but the vitality of this market begins with the reviewer themselves. In

other words, the producer of the content necessarily will need to be consumed in order for the blogosphere to sustain itself.

Therefore, the unmistakable rise in production of blogs is also at the same time the untold tale of its consumption. This consumption process however departs from the vertical one-way interaction model that is typical to how we deal with the traditional media. The blogosphere requires an active audience. There is no obligation to explore or create content, so the only alternative is to put oneself out there, to expose the private to the public, to create while consuming simultaneously. The users of social networking and the blogosphere could in fact be commodifying themselves without conscious realization.

Such consumers, according to Bauman (2007), "are, simultaneously, *promoters of commodities* and the *commodities they promote*. Under whatever rubric their preoccupations would be classified by governmental archivists or investigative journalists, the activity in which all of them are engaged (whether by choice, necessity, or most commonly both) is *marketing*."

Not only therefore the consumers need to be 'produced', in the process of unending consumptions of the blogosphere and social media through the smartphones and the smart TVs, the life itself somewhere gets consumed too. Bauman once again provides an invaluable insight to our consumerist society through his 2001 essay, "Consuming life":

> the powers and the weaknesses, the glory and the blight of the consumer society – a society in which life is consuming through the continuous success of discontinuous consumer concerns (and is itself consumed in its course) – are rooted in the same condition, the anxieties born of and perpetuated by institutional erosion coupled with enforced individualization. And they are shaped up and reproduced by the consumer market-led response to that

condition: the strategy of rationalization or irrationality, standardization of difference, and achieving stability through the induced precariousness of the human condition.

The blogosphere used to be an uncharted territory so far as its viability was concerned only a few years ago. Whimsical or at best, unpredictable were its directions. From unpaid women bloggers to hacktivists to underground press to powerful political agents of change – blogs have as a phenomenon, undergone vast self-sustaining evolution. A new monopoly within the new media (Bagdikian, 2004) is thereafter getting manifested. The increasing visibility of top bloggers – as a way to guarantee the trade's survival - is also at the same time a testament to the increasing submergence of the teeming millions of bloggers. In the Chapter 3, I have mentioned there are 173 million blogs. In view of the visibility of the top few blogs on first couple of search engine result pages, what fate awaits the hundreds of thousands of bloggers – many of whom are decidedly anti-establishment? Apart from saying that the blogosphere itself is doing financially sound going by its major players, there are a few humbling lessons in the process, some of which I shall list out in this chapter.

Dialectics of the Blogosphere

It appears at the end that it is a two-way process when it comes to intersection of blogs with journalism. In the present study itself, the traditional media reflected the blogosphere positively through introducing structural uniqueness of blogs via interactivity elements, and negatively through using sensational headlines, intros and using informal words far too frequently to not go unnoticed. At the same time, the blogosphere appears to have picked up cues from traditional press, positively by

following inverted pyramid format and negatively by increasingly moderating comments.

Secondly, the shift of language is parallel to shifts in focus on social and/or personal issues of prominent politicians. This shift invariably, no matter how temporarily, also is qualitative in the respect that it affects the language in the long run – for instance, once a presidential candidate is called by first name (and one can justifiably blame the heightened climate of political debates), there's no turning back.

Reflecting upon the research study, if journalism appears to be increasingly anti-canonic, then that perhaps is for the better. Dialectically, the best of both worlds of traditional media and blogging shall survive and the dying elements in both shall have to be abandoned. Although there is a hint of vulnerability – considering the difficulties with which the field of journalism has been formalized over the decades – that, the slight erosion in standards will likely be compensated by the enrichment through interaction with blogging as the new media.

But is blogging the new radical media so far as American free speech tradition is concerned? Or, is it merely the continuation in another form? This is an important poser insofar as the questions on future of blogs remain. To understand the spirit of blogging, it is important to undertake a historical survey of the ethos that pervade it. I had started my review of literatures in Chapter 2 with a statement by the American radical, Woody Guthrie. In converting ancient folk songs into political parables for the present, Guthrie's life was devoted to invoking American values of outspokenness which he cherished. For him, his guitar was a machine to *kill the Fascists* because his

words were his weapons. For him and for his comrade Paul Robeson, it was un-American to yield to censorships by the ruling elites of the day.

Indeed, the propensity to speak out, to raise objections, to air grievances, to *raise hell*, have been found embedded in the collective psyche throughout the checkered history of peoples' struggles in this land for centuries. Comes to mind, the going against the grain of Thomas Paine, in the *Common Sense* – "But Britain is the parent country, say some, then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families. Wherefore, the assertion, if true, turns to her reproach; but it happens not to be true, or only partly so, and the phrase parent or mother country hath been jesuitically adopted by the King and his parasites, with a low papistical design of gaining an unfair bias on the credulous weakness of our minds."

Or, of the accusation of fraud and violence against Thomas Jefferson by Benjamin Banneker (1791) - "I freely and cheerfully acknowledge that I am of the African race…and…I now confess to you, that I am not under State of tyrannical thralldom, and inhuman captivity…" Again, going against the founding father, Banneker continues, "... Sir how pitiable is it to reflect, that altho you were so fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father of mankind, and of his equal and impartial distribution of those rights and privileges which he had conferred upon them, that you should at the same time counteract his mercies, in detaining by fraud and violence so numerous a part of my brethren under groaning captivity and cruel oppression, that you should at the Same time be found guilty of that most criminal act, which you professedly detested in others, with respect to yourselves."

Colonial masters and feudal masters were not the only ones American voices spoke out against. Masters in the household also had not been spared. Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions" voiced the discontent in 1848 –

> The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world. He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise. He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice. He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men – both natives and foreigners…He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead…He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man.

It would not be far-fetched to imagine if the sexism in media which so eloquently reflects in the writings across the blogs and traditional journalism has been an enduring value in American society as such – where "different code of morals for men and women" continues to exist to this date, going by the sheer level of tolerance towards and normalization of those double standards, as witnessed during the time of present study.

Critiquing news media for their sexism and sensationalism also is not a new phenomenon that was brought forth by the new media. In 1944, civil rights activist, journalist and editor Oswald Garrison Villard had acknowledged the trend in his essay, "The Disappearing Daily" -

> On behalf of the reporters it should be said that they are as much sinned against as sinning. It is constantly dinned into their ears that when they go to public meetings or to interviews they must look for something "spicy", something to warrant a smart headline, something unexpectedly sensational or controversial. There must always be a bright, snappy "lead". So happenings of no real

importance are constantly "played up" and really valuable statements or actions overlooked.

Sensational basis of news stories is often justified by taking recourse to a populist claim such as, the newspaper owners and editors know what is good for the readers, or that they know what exactly the readers want to read. In doing so, not just a certain aspect of story gets highlighted, but in a systematic fashion the rest of the counter-narratives get buried over time. Great American sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois called it the "slavery of the mind" and chastised such gatekeepers in his essay, "On the Right to Express and Hear Unpopular Opinion" (1953) – "It is not a question as to whether these facts and opinions are right or wrong, true or false. It is the more basic question as to who is going to be the judge of this, and as to how far honest people can remain intelligent if they refuse to listen to unpopular opinions or to facts which they do not want to believe."

This homogenization of acceptable opinions too has been a hallmark of American society which Dr. DuBois had recognized over six decades ago. If under the present study, there was scant coverage of third party opinions, it was because of the dominant media's tendency to cease imagining an alternative to what I have called a "ritual of shock and awe in American duopoly" (Pattanayak, 2016)[78]. In fact, black radicals like Malcolm X, Du Bois and subsequently Angela Davis had actively rejected the positions offered by both the Republicans and Democrats in their times, with the latter two officially joining the Communist Party of the United States of America

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[78] Pattanayak, S. (2016, November 14). Donald Trump and the ritual of shock and awe in American duopoly. *Kindle Magazine*. Retrieved from http://kindlemag.in/donald-trump-ritual-shock-awe-american-duopoly/

(CPUSA). Green Party's Ralph Nader has time and again raised eyebrows regarding the omission of third-party narratives from presidential debates. In an interview with *Democracy Now*'s Amy Goodman, Nader (2016) called the phenomenon a "two-party tyranny" -

> Corporations are deciding who debates, when they debate, who asks the questions. So, in the primaries, you had major corporations decide who gets on, who doesn't….Now we have the Super Bowl of debates, and we have another corporation, which is funded by other corporations, like Anheuser-Busch, Ford Motor Company, AT&T. They have these hospitality suites at the debate location. And this is controlled by the two-party tyranny that doesn't want any competition, doesn't want voices that represent majoritarian directions in this country, like living wage, full Medicare for all, crackdown on corporate crime, pulling back on empire, civil liberties advance instead of the PATRIOT Act. All of these are represented by our third parties, which cannot reach tens of millions of people.[79]

Among the third parties, also prominent is Party for Socialism and Liberation which had fielded a woman candidate Peta Lindsay in 2012. I had blogged at the time calling for more inclusiveness of unpopular opinions in the presidential debates -

"Although the Committee on Presidential Debates is constituted to entertain divergent visions and to present to people the presidential candidates with alternative views, during Obama's tenure, it was decided to censor the two radical alternatives to Obama/Romney aspirations – both challengers happened be two women Presidential candidates – Peta Lindsay and Jill Stein."[80]

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[79] Goodman, A. (Interviewer) & Nader, R. (Interviewee). (2016). Two-Party Tyranny [Interview transcript]. Retrieved from Democracy Now! Web site: https://www.democracynow.org/2016/9/19/two_party_tyranny_ralph_nader_on

[80] Pattanayak, S. (2012, November 6). Obama is winning his war on women candidates. *Saswat Blog*. Retrieved from http://saswat.com/obama-vs-peta-lindsey/

The traditional media reporters and leading bloggers have demonstratively omitted any reference to the historical significance of the *other* women candidates during the US Presidential elections when they are not endorsed by the two-party system. Even as much attention has been given to race and gender in recent times when it comes to political talking points, noticeably absent from the discourse across media writings have been references to women of color candidates such as Peta Lindsay, Cynthia McKinney, and Rosa Clemente. Green Party's Jill Stein has found coverage especially after she called for a voting recount, but none of the media sampled found anything historical about her being a woman, and for winning nomination as a Presidential candidate for a political party.

This complex web of race and gender identities finds an explanation in the class composition of the ruling elites – that include, media owners. The economic basis of dominant parties and leading media houses often have colluded to create a consensus around issues and candidates, limiting the political imaginations of an otherwise vibrant electorate. Once again, this political-economic understanding of media discourse is neither foreign, nor new to American radical tradition. The great American educationist John Dewey took note of this in 1935 when he wrote in his seminal essay, aptly titled, "Our Un-Free Press" -

> The only really fundamental approach to the problem is to inquire concerning the necessary effect of the present economic system upon the whole system of publicity; upon the judgment of what news is, upon the selection and elimination of matter that is published, upon the treatment of news in both editorial and news columns. The question, under this mode of approach, is not how many specific abuses there are and how they may be remedied, but how far genuine intellectual freedom and social responsibility are possible on any large scale under the existing economic regime.

It is back to the basics, as Prof. Dewey suggested long ago – to understand the problem is to explore the roots. So long as the current economic system of capitalism continues unscathed, there shall be hierarchies of news, formats and styles. The good news however, is that due to the *new rhetorical mix* as I alluded to in the beginning of this work, the old form is adopting some of the new styles, while the new form is clinging unto some of the traditional formats. This leads to disruptions in the political economy itself, no matter how unstructured or disorganized.

I shall end this study with final observations on the consequences of those disruptions, their implications for future studies, and my concluding thoughts.

Limitations

One of the consequences of the new rhetorical mix of new media with the traditional, is that it is extremely difficult to make distinctions between the perceived roles and the actual ones, played by journalists in the blogosphere. This is one of the *limitations* of this study. The psychological basis of "why journalists blog"[81] is an important research work waiting to be completed, to somewhat overcome this limitation. Their political identities, their economic incentives, their personal narratives – an ethnographic study of journalists who blog, is paramount.

Secondly, this study could be furthered by serious probing into the interactivity elements. Tweets, videos, hyperlinks, ads, commenting platform – these may appear at the surface to be codes that are embedded unto a webpage. But once they are published,

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[81] Pattanayak, S (2006), *Why journalists blog: A study of blogging as an avocation of career journalists*. Unpublished manuscript.

they take a form of their own – they become live. The limitation of this study has been an abridged analysis of how the *live* audience interacts with these dynamic elements.

Third deficiency is one of comparative media analysis. Apart from mentioning the viewership data of television channels, this study almost pretends that the audience which makes sense of blog and newsprint articles do not interact with the television channels with equal rigor, or vigor. A textual analysis of the transcripts of television news coverage would have kept this study much more contemporary.

What is a limitation here is an opportunity for researchers beyond this dissertation. This is but a microscopic case study of a pre-primary phase of an election season. Many more such phases and not-so eventful periods need to be critically examined, so that the process of explicating blogs and media norms continue to enrich the field of journalism.

One major *disruption* is noticeable through televised humor. Some of the blog articles under study did refer to political humor, but where this genre really shines is in the non-new media – cable television. Saturday Night Live, Stephen Colbert, Jon Stewart - in the tradition of George Carlin – are keeping not just wit intact to provide for the necessary comic relief, but more importantly, they are taking on the power structure with the sort of irreverence that is arguably unprecedented, except found in the most radical quarters of the blogosphere. For the purpose of future studies, this is one area that can be closely examined to validate the scope and capacity of both form of media.

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Figuratively speaking, it is no stretch to claim that daily journalism is a mirror for society. Its language therefore reflects that of its audience - a language that is accessible, aspirational and possibly empowering. Much of journalism also comprises, to once again invoke songwriter Woody Guthrie, plain rambling. Just as not everything makes sense in our lives, many events that unfold around us are not supposed to make sense - at least not in the same way to each one of us. Depending on the socioeconomic backgrounds of the audience, the same report does elicit a variety of responses. After all, journalists do not own the event they cover – they merely interpret the occurrence, much like their readers do afterwards.

Hunter S. Thompson once wrote to Tom Wolfe describing himself as a "natural word thief in every way". He wrote, "We're both thieves, stealing from Reality - which is like Faulkner's notion of land-ownership. Only a mean fool or a twisted ego-freak would try to claim ownership of a scene just because he saw it" (p. 143).

Journalists steal from reality all the time – that is their professional prerogative. But while giving back, their repackaging of the scene varies from one another. Some stories end up winning awards, and some flaks. Some articles appear more credible than the others. Some meet the professional standards, and some, not so much. Retelling of an event is necessarily a subjective process and yet reporters are professionally trained to be as scientific, precise and objective as possible in their trade - to minimize rambling, to craft an intro that is universally appealing, to answer the five Ws and one H, and to quote the authorities to make the story appear legitimate.

Whether suppression of subjective biases in news reports involves self-censorship or it is a cardinal principle that journalists voluntarily adhere to is a matter of dispute. But what is quite clear from the current study is that various subjectivities do come into play across media reports, especially more so within the blogosphere. And considering that the blogosphere is no longer alien to the process of news production, perhaps this is an indication that a new form of journalism is underway.

It is a new form of journalism that is impacted by the blogosphere just as it instructs the bloggers. As this dissertation amply demonstrates, there's nothing so traditional about print media that it cannot fit the needs of modern times, and there's nothing so new about the blogosphere that it can replace the traditional norms.

Traditional media houses are increasingly lapping up interactivity elements and commenting systems, whereas the blogosphere is also exhibiting credible newsworthy items that follow inverted pyramid styles and source verifications. Little wonder then that many bloggers have been receiving press credentials – this researcher included (credentialed by the NYPD), while many renowned journalists from traditional press are running their own news blogs.

As discussed in the literature review, it used to be that most bloggers were "housewives" writing on Livejournal. And today many bloggers have White House access and at least one of them managed to reach the position of an advisor to the President of the country. The enormous presence of blogs and the vast influence of bloggers then point to something more urgent, so far as journalism research is concerned. And this dissertation addresses only the leading edge of what promises to be a wave of sweeping and monolithic change.

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Because the traditional media houses have accepted the growth of the blogosphere, even to the extent of incorporating within their domains and pages exclusive blogs of their own, it became imperative that a structured study be conducted to analyze the way that blogs and traditional media intersect. This dissertation has begun the task of explicating blogs and relating their characteristics to those of traditional media in an effort to explore how these new platforms have affected reporters and bloggers in the process.

One of the key areas where this dissertation contributes to knowledge in the field of journalism and public communication is in identifying differences as well as similarities in language and discourse of the blogosphere and of traditional media as they encounter similar news events. While the stylistic components in writing across traditional press and the blogosphere are found to be markedly different, there also is perceptible tension between the two that points to a non-dichotomous relationship. The overlap between the two media genres also is apparent, even as the respective characteristics of blogs and traditional news retain their uniqueness. Not to be ignored is the strong correlation between the two media when it comes to defining and covering of newsworthy issues and events.

While rooted in the tradition of empirical mass media research, this dissertation argues that analysis of relationships in the 21st Century media mix, including an explication of the blogosphere, is potentially the next "major milestone" in mass media research (DeFleur, 1983). To qualify as a milestone, DeFleur explained, a body of media research should meet one of four criteria – it should be a study of social impact of media, it should address how media are used for social good (or what DeFleur called,

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"prosocial manipulation"), it should incorporate specific social issues and historic events, or it could stem entirely from a general theoretical orientation.

Considering these criteria, DeFleur included in his list of eleven major milestones in media research the following: the Payne Fund Studies to address effects of movies on children; the radio panic studies known as "Invasion from Mars"; studies of the media's role in political elections by Lazersfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet; the film evaluation studies of "Why We Fight" movies; Hovland's studies on laws of persuasion and the search for the "magic keys"; findings on personal influence and two-step flow of communication; examination of the airborne leaflet as a specialized medium of communication under "Project Revere"; Werthem's analysis of comic books as controversial medium; Wilbur Schramm's studies on how children used television; the Federal task force report on violence and media; and finally, the Surgeon General's report on how television may impact social behavior.

Maxwell McCombs (1983) in the *Milestones* book writes that in the world of mass communication, the present is always moving. So, for the study of mass media to be a science, not only should it be conceptual and intellectually cumulative, but it must also be historically cumulative. Before DeFleur started compiling a list of milestones, Wilbur Schramm (1977) had described mass communication research as a crossroads where many pass, but few tarry. Schramm observed that "more than half of all the research ever conducted on human communication has become available in the last eighteen years".

In this later edition of his "The Process and Effects of Mass Communication" (co-edited with Donald F. Roberts), Schramm included seminal works by Melvin

DeFleur (on mass media as socio-economic systems), Harold Lasswell (on act of communication model), Marshal McLuhan ("the medium is the message"), Kurt and Gladys Lang (on television news reporting), Carl Hovland (on effectiveness of persuasion), and Paul Lazarsfeld (on effects of mass communication), among others.

Schramm and his colleagues also took note of the importance of societies and their influence on media. In the media classic "Four Theories of the Press", Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) dwell on the authoritarian theory, the libertarian theory, the social responsibility theory and the Soviet communist theory while suggesting that the "press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates." Labeling the American journalism tradition as one of social responsibility, the experts suggest that the chief purpose of mass media is to "inform, entertain, sell – but chiefly to raise conflict to the plane of discussion". Accordingly, media narratives are assumed to be controlled by community opinion, consumer actions and professional ethics, so that "media must assume obligation of social responsibility; and if they do not, someone must see that they do" (p.7). The only matters that should be forbidden in the press and media coverages within all four media environments are those shown to be serious invasions of recognized private rights and vital social interests.

The blogosphere provides strong cues to suggest that now is the time to continue the great traditions of mass communication research. As Nerone, et al. (1995) pointed out in the revisiting of the *Four Theories*, even the traditional media of the contemporary era also are in violations, and perhaps, in their argument, for the better. They write, "social responsibility theory actually endorses the status quo by erecting

standards of performance that can make monopoly media seem like the voice of the people, even as the media keep the people silent and stupid" (p. 79). Their book, titled "Last Rights" makes another salient point that applies to the blogosphere rather well, in taking into cognizance the evolution of a press theory in modern times –

> "And while we hope our doctors are more learned medically than we are, we should be uncomfortable with the notion that our journalists are more learned politically than we are. After all, in democratic societies, it is the public who should govern; democratic media then should let the people talk to each other rather than just listen to experts."

The old debate concerning whether or not professional journalists should be treated as a class of experts is rendered obsolete with the emergence of the blogosphere. The blogs serve as powerful vehicles for people to use--not just to talk to each other across social and political boundaries-- but also to herald and inform one another as citizen journalists or grassroots reporters at will.

Revisiting of social responsibility theory also begs for a new theoretical lens using which canonic texts for media research can indeed be updated. In their co-edited book "Canonic texts in media research", Katz, Peters, Liebes and Orloff (2003) discuss several major theories. Lazarsfeld's and Merton's critical research and Herzog's debate over active audience formed the discussion surrounding tradition of the Columbia School. Horkheimer and Adorno's essay on the culture industry, Walter Benjamin's take on art in age of mechanical reproduction and Lowenthal's mass idols of consumption came under the Frankfurt School texts. Likewise, under Chicago School of media research traditions, the major developments included Wirth's theory on consensus, Lang and Lang's work on the crowds, and Horton's and Wohl's work on para-social interaction. The Toronto School represented Marshal McLuhan

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("Understanding Media") and Harold Innis's take on bias of communication. Finally, Raymond William's *Culture and Society,* Stewart Hall's *Encoding/Decoding*, and Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure* comprised theories essential for modern studies of mass media out of the world of British Cultural Studies.

The Blogosphere Model

In the evolution of media research traditions, the classic theories and subsequent refinements from various schools of thought have included the magic bullet theory, selective and limited influence theory, two-step flow of communication theory, the uses and gratifications theory, modeling theory, adoption of innovation theory, agenda-setting theory, and other theories of persuasion. But with the active agency of the audience in terms of not just interaction, but also in production of stylized content and their circulation thereafter through shares, the daily activity and public discourse in the blogosphere provides an opportunity for developing an evidence-based grounded theory - a new public communication model, which I will call the "Blogosphere Model".

In the current dissertation, using the "Blogosphere Model" and taking into account various distinct characteristics that distinguish the blogosphere from traditional media as a journalistic outlet, I have found that the blogosphere is capable of serving as a site for theorization, theory development and testing.

In 1998, DeFleur revisited his list of milestones in a scholarly essay titled "Where have all the milestones gone?" to lament the slowdown in media studies that made significant theoretical contributions. He wrote, "No widely heralded investigation has been produced in nearly two decades – not one that provoked wide

discussion and changed the way scholars think about the mass communication process." He reasoned that the slowing of research was due to variety of reasons including "a change in the agendas of the social sciences, a lack of a programmatic approach by media scholars, a shift to non-quantitative and critical modes of analysis by many writers, and changes in the work conditions of the professorate" (p. 86).
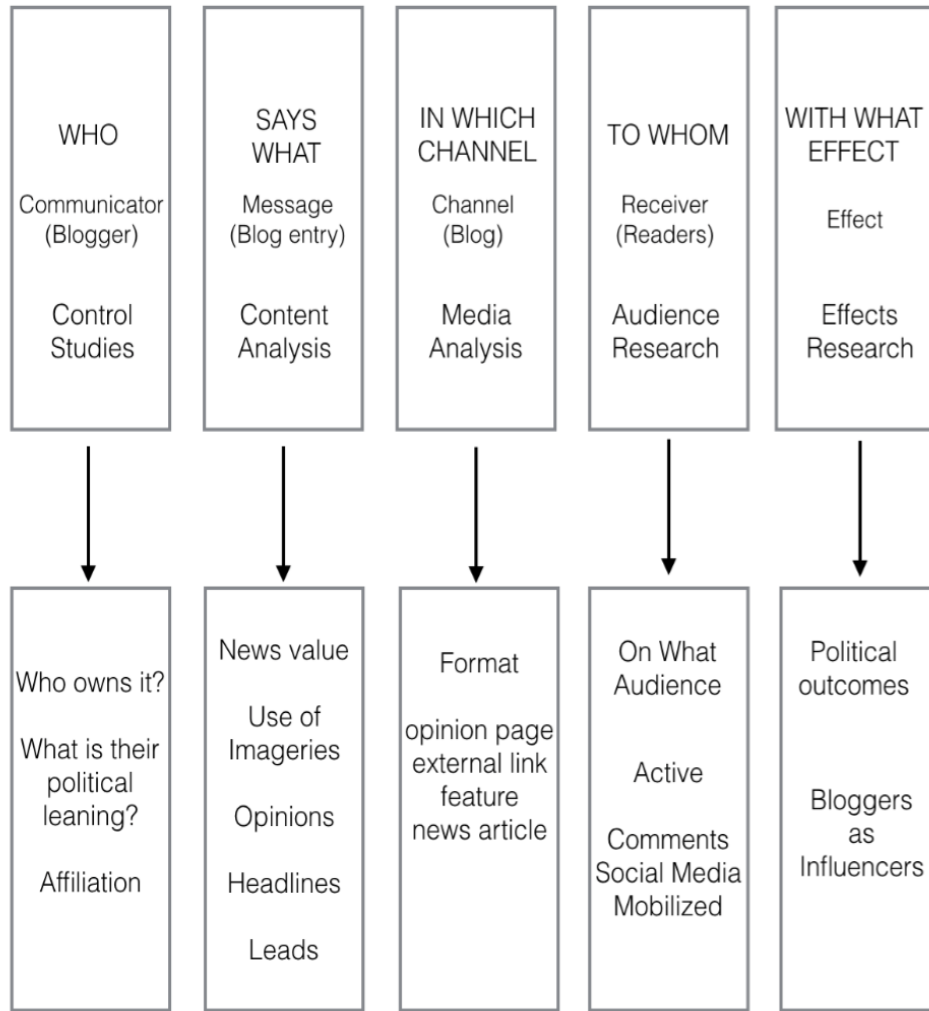
The milestone potential of the blogosphere as a communication medium and as a site for ground-breaking research is unique, owing to its journalistic characteristics. Unlike other elements of "information society" (Ito, 1981; van Cuilenburg, 1987; Melody, 1990; Castells, 2000), blogging is specifically related to media because of its classic mass communication features. By sheer reach, the blogosphere wields a tremendous number and variety of access points. The audience of the blogosphere is quite possibly the most active and engaged, as compared to consumers of other media, in that they choose to browse through specific articles, to participate by commenting, and to share content and comments among others on and off the blog site, who in turn, engage and exercise their power of making choices, commenting, and sharing.

After newsprint, propaganda films, radio news, television news, the best candidate for a mass medium with comparable impacts on the world of journalism is the blogosphere. I am therefore proposing the following communication model (shown in Figure 3) as a continuation of the present study of the blogosphere, developing this line of research into a milestone in mass communication research. The present study has focused on the first three classic elements of communications studies–communicator, message and channel. In the literature review section, I have discussed the histories of ownership of blogs and their political ramifications so far as elections

are concerned. I have also listed the affiliations of leading political bloggers (the "communicators" in this chart). In terms of the message itself, the unit of my analysis in the present study is the blog entry which I used to analyze vis a vis the content of traditional news, commentaries, headlines, etc.

The two topical and methodological areas that this dissertation has not addressed and proposes for future studies which I hope to undertake subsequently include (1) audience research and (2) effects research. Whereas I have credited the audience of the blogosphere as an exceptionally engaged and active group due to the technological requirements of blogging, it remains to be seen how they *use* the blogosphere for their *gratifications.* Why do the audience share and comment upon certain contents on the social media? How do they affiliate and mobilize themselves? How do they reach by blogging across the constraints of geography, nationality, and culture? These are some of the issues that can be explored further within a blogosphere landmark study. Likewise, I have listed the most popular political blogs and certainly have used in this dissertation, articles written by influential bloggers. But future studies can determine how exactly do these targeted blogs and their communities result in specific political outcomes. The Figure 3, titled "The Blogosphere Model", is built upon the "Lasswell Formula" (1948), and is illustrative of the need to continue the research beyond this point.

Figure 3: ***The Blogosphere Model***

WHO	SAYS WHAT	IN WHICH CHANNEL	TO WHOM	WITH WHAT EFFECT
Communicator (Blogger)	Message (Blog entry)	Channel (Blog)	Receiver (Readers)	Effect
Control Studies	Content Analysis	Media Analysis	Audience Research	Effects Research

| Who owns it?

What is their political leaning?

Affiliation | News value

Use of Imageries

Opinions

Headlines

Leads | Format

opinion page
external link
feature
news article | On What Audience

Active

Comments
Social Media
Mobilized | Political outcomes

Bloggers as Influencers |

Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (2002) argue that newsworthiness can be often explained by the structural factors such as ownership and control, advertisements and the relationship between media and those who have the power to define the news. Such a political-economic basis of media is manifested in subsequent monopolization as pointed out by Ben Bagdikian (2004) in the modern media classic, "New Media Monopoly". He mentions there are five major conglomerates (Time Warner, the Walt Disney Company, News Corporation, Viacom and Bertelsmann) that control much of the news flow and production, and that "none of the dominant media companies bother

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with dominance merely in a single medium. Their strategy has been to have major holdings in all the media, from newspapers to movie studios. This gives each of the five corporations and their leaders more communications power than was exercised by any despot or dictatorship in history" (p. 3).

The blogosphere is not immune to the new media monopoly any more than the information society itself is. As van Dijk (2005) notes, there is a deepening digital divide and access to information by itself is not an indicator of power. He writes, "Information is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the possession of power. Otherwise those people gathering, processing, and diffusing information all day and in the highest quantities, such as scientists, teachers, and journalists, would be the most powerful people in society" (p. 145). Turns out that the most powerful people in the blogosphere are akin to their traditional media counterparts – the owners. Or, at least in the case of the chief strategist in the White House today, Steve Bannon, an executive chair of a company which runs the blog. Despite there being hundreds of millions of blogs, only a few dozens have substantial circulations – as listed in the literature review chapter. It is because of the role advertisements play. Advertisers follow the same models in blogosphere as in the traditional media sphere – that is, more readership and traction guarantee more revenues through ads. This leads to monopolization in the new media just as it has led to, within the traditional press.

Robert W. McChesney in the book "Digital Disconnect" (2013) proposes a model by which digital news operations could literally follow the path of "public good" which has always been more or less the goal of journalism. He writes,

"Imagine a website in the blogosphere right now covering national politics, producing some great content, getting hundreds of thousands of regular visitors, but depending on low-paid or volunteer labor and praying for advertising crumbs or donations for revenue. Now the site goes formally nonprofit, stops obsessing over advertising, and appeals directly to its readers. Imagine this outfit getting twenty thousand people to steer their vouchers into its accounts" (p. 213).

Nicholas Kristof also aired similar views when he wrote in his column for the *New York Times* that "the entire media world needs new revenue sources — including philanthropy — to finance coverage that is important but unprofitable."

Somewhere between the monopolized blogosphere and a utopian one being suggested by some critics of capitalism lies a workaround. I looked at a phase of news coverage that was among the nastiest, not just in their linguistic expressions, but going by the sudden spikes in circulations for certain cable channels and blogs – in their competition. Contradictions of capitalism as Marx had envisaged are playing out in the interactions between various forms of media, most visibly between the traditional and the new. The lies and the sensational, the manipulation of the reality to suit the headlines, the name-calling and slut-shaming, the airing of xenophobe quotes – the vitiated culture in the new journalism is going to be unsparing – it may appear to be more of a blogosphere characteristic at the moment, but it will eventually engulf the traditional media if the serious journalists continue to look away let alone embrace the profiteering motives of anything-goes-headlines as I discussed in the preceding chapter.

Just as contradictions within capitalism continue to produce class-consciousness among the impacted poor, contradictions within the professional

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journalistic standards will eventually empower the masses to proclaim themselves as citizen-journalists. The identification of journalists with major political parties that almost obliterates the need to cover alternative voices within the remaining ones is also partly indicative of the tendency to overlook human interest stories in favor of celebrity-driven stories.

The blogosphere did not arise out of a specific need to challenge the traditional media. Its mainstay has been the growing popularity – also indicative of the audience need to veer away from traditional press enough to seek out the alternative media. Likewise, for the content creators and underground media activists, the blogosphere has been providing an outlet that has not been made available within the traditional media platforms. There are possibilities for the blogosphere itself to be co-opted, commercialized, and monopolized as I have suggested in this dissertation. And yet, as discussed in Chapter 2, there is no denying its potential to be utilized to organize protests, to air collective grievances and rally around, and raise funds for causes in ways not usually possible when traditional media are used as similar vehicles.

In one of my interactions with late Professor Michael Gurevitch almost ten years ago, he wondered about the nature of the blogosphere. He suggested to me that all these countless blogs appear to be noise. The blogs are almost indulging in a riot of sorts, he said, noting that there is nothing structured about the blogs beyond the technological aspects. I agreed with him then. His observations seem to be as relevant today – there are no canons or standards by which the blogosphere operates. It seems to me as though the blogosphere is an equivalent of the *Occupy* movement – a movement without leadership or strict guidelines. Only time will tell if the noise and

the riot will turn revolutionary enough to end possibilities of corporate takeovers and monopolizations, or they will ultimately fizzle out as underground voices of dissent.

Postscripts and Implications

Usually election studies focus on the merits of candidates, of the electoral process, audience participation, and on the winners and losers. This study had all the potential to be especially so, considering the value-laden rhetoric that permeated the pre-primary phase of the 2015-16 elections. But the temptation to conduct a political study here was overridden by the need to go beyond this path-breaking election. No matter who won this season, in retrospect it looks like journalism has lost a tiny bit of their turf and ethical power. I.F. Stone used to say that the reporters should not be stenographers. Merely parroting a politician's quote comprises no responsible journalism.

As a former journalist and currently a blogger, I found the results of the present study to be somewhat astounding, and also a bit reassuring. First the astounding part – the tendency to follow the herd was so obvious across the media platforms. It seemed as though the news reports were increasingly leaving behind humanitarian stories in order to cater to sensational Tweets. Far from being champions of the underdogs, the press in traditional sense and in the blogosphere appeared more to cater to celebrity quotes. It is not a minor observation because journalism always has a "public good" component to it by default, whether or not one endorses it. Public communication is a responsible job and witnessing its trivialization was disturbing.

Now the reassuring component – there were many a reflections on how the media should behave during election seasons. Ron Fournier who covered American

politics for three decades, wrote a column in *The Atlantic* titled, "A farewell guide to political journalism" to reiterate what a good reporter should do if they have no inclination to leave political journalism. His mantra was "a reporter's job is to get as close to the truth as possible", even if it meant hurting a source, since reporters were working for the public, not for their editors or sources or other reporters on the beat.

Sometimes it is worth revisiting the basic principles to reassure ourselves. And this election provided plenty of such occasions to reflect. One such reflection was on the language itself – also, the crux of this study. Nathan Heller for the *New Yorker* wrote:

> In a climate where common language is not held accountable to common meaning, "taking a stand" becomes a mostly theatrical exercise. Trump, the candidate, is all about "taking a stand," announcing values and setting trajectories. That little seems to be backed by fixed meaning or process isn't, as some observers claim, a quirk of his campaign. Believing oneself to stand for inexpressible values of American greatness is not actually very different from believing oneself to stand for inexpressible values of American counterculture, or populism, or freedom. Trumpism is successful because it leverages a disconnect among language, meaning, and process that's deep-set in our national life. He can say anything these days—because the rest of us can, too.

Looking at the sampled data and analysis, I find there are various valuable lessons to be drawn, not just for political coverages in newspapers and blogs, but essentially beyond that. First, not every issue is important to be covered. Just because a celebrity tweets on something, it does not have to translate into newsworthiness. Politicians calling each other Hitler perhaps do not deserve undue media mentions. In this era of unfiltered and enormous information sharing, there will be temptations to create news stories from anything that looks sensational. And this is a temptation that must be resisted for journalism to retain its educational, public-good component. Issues

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such as climate change, poverty, education and healthcare (apart from Zika virus) attracted negligible coverage in 2016, according to Tyndall Report.

Second, this post-truth era is not a reality so far as journalism is concerned. Journalism is about truth-seeking. There will be allure to jump into conclusions to declare something as fake, or alternative truth, or simply baseless. But journalists and bloggers alike shall need to persist on their quest for truth-seeking through verifications. Precision journalism needs to be welcomed back to the fold.

Thirdly, diversity in the newsroom and on beats - needs to be promoted. One important lesson from this election is that many identities were subsumed under the labels of socio-economic class. More reports from the hinterlands should take precedence over routine coverages from the country's capital. The priority given to White House briefings needs to be at least complemented by the heterogeneous coverage of remote areas. Just as the vertical flow of information is unhealthy at the international level where only certain first world countries hog most resources, it is equally concerning when Washington D.C. dictates the news flow within the nation itself. The systematic neglect of various states and their working people not only creates a less egalitarian readership, but it also results in a political process whose subjects are largely detached from it.

Fourth, as a corollary, social locations such as race, gender, ability and sexuality are important indicators of privileges and oppressions. Reporters and bloggers need to constantly ask of themselves the stands they take vis-à-vis their obligation to the public which belongs to a complex of social locations. Not every story can cater to everyone and there should not be a pretension to attain that goal either. Articles in the

blogosphere and traditional media should be so various that they purposively address specific audiences who are traditionally left out – such as the refugees, the disabled, the immigrant women, the homeless children, the uninsured sick, and so on.

For the fifth lesson, I will quote a Washington Post headline, "Stop giving Trump the headlines he wants". Journalists are supposed to speak truth to power. They are not supposed to be public relations executives of the administrations. Most of the contentiousness of this election at pre-primary phase could have been avoided if the headlines and the leads focused on the actual issues rather than quoting the candidates at their worst.

It is a given by now that news is socially constructed and its values are guarded subsequently by the gatekeepers. But what this dissertation has been able to offer and support as a claim is to say that even the style is socially constructed. The unconventional format, the irreverent language, the vast departure from respect for leading candidates, the parroting of problematic dominant narratives on terrorism – all the tables in the preceding chapter that took into account the deviations at a molecular level – provided adequate ammunition to suggest the social construction of news style. The new rhetorical mix as I have called it in this work is one that did not emanate from any canonic texts or style books. The irreverence in interaction between the people and the public figure over time has contributed to the resultant styles in journalism. In a way, the blogosphere has presented to us with a new genre of political reporting with its own unique styles, that are commensurate with the changing times. Innovations do not occur in isolation, and hence there are bound to be reactions. The future of journalism will be rife with struggles to make sense of those reactions. They have

already begun in issues concerning privacy rights, censorship, digital rights, data mining, and Internet civil liberties.

It will not be an easy terrain for journalism to tread as constant interventions and attempts to stifle, or even to name-call, persist into the future. Media can even continue to be described as the "enemy of the people" by the ruling powers. But it will behoove the journalists and the media educators alike to remember what Kwame Ture reminded through an UPI dispatch back in 1966: "There is a higher law than the law of government. That's the law of conscience." This thought has guided American storytellers for centuries, and it most probably shall continue to do so.

Appendices

Chi-Square Tests – Type of Publication and Unorthodox Language

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.739[a]	4	.003
Likelihood Ratio	15.179	4	.004
N of Valid Cases	300		

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.116[a]	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	21.319	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	18.812	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	300		

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.486[a]	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	20.620	4	.000
N of Valid Cases	300		

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	27.302[a]	12	.007
Likelihood Ratio	27.942	12	.006
Linear-by-Linear Association	.107	1	.743
N of Valid Cases	300		

Chi-Square Tests - Professional Title of Lead Author and Slangs or Profanities Used

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	116.662[a]	24	.000
Likelihood Ratio	59.262	24	.000
N of Valid Cases	300		

Chi-Square Tests - Professional Title of the Lead Author and Use of Personal Narrative

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	158.111[a]	24	.000
Likelihood Ratio	92.912	24	.000
N of Valid Cases	300		

Chi Square Tests - Professional Title of the Lead Author and Format of Blog/Article

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	173.484[a]	72	.000
Likelihood Ratio	127.351	72	.000
N of Valid Cases	300		

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	173.207[a]	30	.000
Likelihood Ratio	162.823	30	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.934	1	.005
N of Valid Cases	300		

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