BLOGGING POLITICS: A CASE STUDY OF THE 2004 ELECTION

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The recent popularity of the weblog, or “blog,” has been receiving a significant amount of attention within the mainstream press. While weblogs are devoted to issues ranging across the social spectrum, political weblogs have become the focus of most of this attention, as they increasingly weighed-in on events concerning the past 2004 election. Many scholars and journalists speculate whether the political weblog is a trend or a lasting online institution. With so much of their focus on elections, will political weblogs sustain their momentum and popularity after the election-cycle is over?

Taking a pointedly partisan stance on national and state elections and issuing a running commentary on articles and issues in the mainstream and online press, DailyKos has established itself as the most highly trafficked, interactive, Democratic weblog online. To investigate the research question, my study compared activity levels and content on Daily Kos before and after the 2004 election. The results of this comparison show that the activity levels increased following the election, while the content transited from campaigns and elections to policy and party. There were
also indications that the interactivity of the Daily Kos blog facilitated online community. Overall, these findings suggest that it is not the campaign and election-oriented content that sustains the momentum and popularity of political blogs like Daily Kos; it is the invitation to engage the political process through democratic discussion.
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Chapter 1. Blogging Politics

The recent popularity of the weblog, or “blog,” has been receiving a significant amount of attention within the mainstream press. While weblogs are devoted to issues ranging across the social spectrum, political weblogs have become the focus of most of this attention, as they increasingly weighed-in on events concerning the past 2004 election. Many scholars and journalists speculate whether the political weblog is a trend or a lasting online institution. With so much of their focus on elections, will political weblogs sustain their momentum and popularity after the election-cycle is over?

Taking a pointedly partisan stance on national and state elections and issuing a running commentary on articles and issues in the mainstream and online press, Daily Kos has established itself as the most highly trafficked, interactive, Democratic weblog. To investigate the research question, my study compares activity levels and content on Daily Kos before and after the 2004 election. I hypothesize that there will be a statistically significant difference between activity level and content before and after the election.

Speculation would suggest support for the hypothesis, and that the difference would be an overall decrease in activity. The new media, grassroots strategy so revered in the Democratic political blogosphere failed to win either the majority in
Congress or the Presidency. Moreover, immediately following the election, Democrats had at least one year before they could do any serious campaigning, and two years before these campaigns could do anything to change the balance of power. The combination of disappointing losses and the absence of a critical point of interest for the Daily Kos community seemed to suggest that interest in the blog would drop. However, the results of my study show that the activity levels actually increased following the election, while the content transited from campaigns and elections to policy and party.

**Developments: Social Security**

Beginning in January 2005, emerging developments in the left-leaning political blogosphere provided anecdotal reasons behind the activity increases. The first of these developments was the opposition by a number of left-leaning bloggers to President Bush’s plan to reform Social Security in his second term. Using the Internet as a tool for political organization and action, these bloggers created an entirely new blog called “thereisnocrisis.com” to promote the notion that the Social Security “crisis” was nonexistent and the president’s plan was unnecessary (Hitlin, 2005). The blog, with links to articles and supportive organizations, was an attempt to create a specific media frame and assert influence beyond the “blogosphere” (Hitlin, 2005).
Not only was the blog comprised of a broad-based coalition of like-minded blogs, reputable and established organizations like AARP, AFL-CIO, and the Democratic National Committee (DNC), with similar opposition to Bush’s Social Security reform joined the online campaign. While it is difficult to measure the success of this initiative at the time of this writing, a recent article in the *Washington Post* on April 5, 2005 noted, “President Bush's top priority, restructuring Social Security, made little if any progress despite his all-out campaigning during the recess, key lawmakers said” (Babington, 2005). Whether this can be directly attributed to the online efforts of the bloggers is nearly impossible to discern. However, that the blogs were able to coalesce around an issue and coordinate with “offline” organizations of influence does signify sustained activity and interest in the political process by the blog community.

**Developments: Jeff Gannon Scandal**

Another development in the left-leaning blogosphere indicating sustained or increased activity also emerged in January 2005. During President Bush's January 26, 2005 White House press conference, Jeff Gannon, Washington bureau chief and White House correspondent for the self-described conservative news outlet Talon News, asked the president the following question:

“Senate Democratic leaders have painted a very bleak picture of the U.S. economy. [Senate Minority Leader] Harry Reid [D-NV] was talking about soup
lines. And [Senator] Hillary Clinton [D-NY] was talking about the economy being on the verge of collapse. Yet in the same breath they say that Social Security is rock solid and there's no crisis there. How are you going to work -- you've said you are going to reach out to these people -- how are you going to work with people who seem to have divorced themselves from reality?"1

Dan Froomkin, a writer for the Washington Post had documented instances of similar “softball” questions from Gannon as early as February 19, 2004. At that time, he pointed out that, “Within the press corps, Gannon is known for asking softball questions” particularly when White House press secretary Scott McClellan is “fending off hardballs” about the president (Froomkin, 19 February, 2004). Again on March 9, 2004 when McClellan was fielding difficult questions about “about the 9/11 commission and the possible inappropriate juxtaposition of a visit to a 9/11 memorial with a fundraiser” he turned to Gannon who likened the fundraising tactic to President Roosevelt’s “Remember Pearl Harbor,” even bringing a pin to show the slogan (Froomkin, 10 March, 2004).

What set January 26th apart from these earlier instances is the research done about Jeff Gannon by several left-leaning blogs like Daily Kos, Media Matters for America and Americablog. They uncovered that Gannon, who had been writing for the websites Talon News and GOPUSA, is actually James Dale Guckert, a man linked to online domain addresses with sexually provocative names such as Hotmilitarystud.com and Militaryescorts.com (Kurtz, 2005). They also revealed that even before he worked for Talon News, he was credentialed under his assumed name
as a member of the White House Press Corps. He was also privy to a classified CIA memo outing Ambassador Joseph Wilson’s wife, Valerie Plame, as an undercover CIA agent.

Many people saw the release of the memo as blatant political retribution for Wilson’s remarks against the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The bloggers believed Gannon’s access to the memo pointed to suspect activities by the Bush Administration. Moreover, they felt that his “softball” questions and his often misleading and partisan questions made him questionable. Markos Moulitsas, the owner and author of Daily Kos said of Gannon: "He has been extremely anti-gay in his writings. He's been a shill for the Christian right. So there's a certain level of hypocrisy there that I thought was fair game and needed to be called out" (Kurtz, 2005).

The left-leaning blogosphere’s research on the “Gannon-scandal,” like the opposition to Social Security, once again had an impact on “offline” events. The mainstream media gave it a moderate amount of coverage. The mainstream attention caused Gannon/Guckert to resign from his position at Talon News to "put some separation between Talon News and the White House" (Kurtz, 2005). Finally, the new information from the blogosphere compelled Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-N.Y.) to write a letter to President Bush asking him to explain why Gannon "was repeatedly cleared by your staff to join the legitimate White House press corps" (Kurtz, 2005). Like the
opposition to Bush’s Social Security reform, it is difficult to ascertain the specific and long-term impact of the blogosphere’s research on Gannon. What can be established from this development is that there are indications that the blog community sustained its activity levels by moving on to new issues after the campaigns ended.

**Developments: Politicians on Daily Kos**

The prior two developments centered on actions taken on behalf of the blogosphere towards policy and partisan issues. This final development, specific to Daily Kos, suggests that the blog community continues to play a role in politics and with politicians, beyond the campaign. Since January, the beginning of the legislative session, there has been a trend of elected officials setting up member accounts on Daily Kos and actively communicating with members of the blog. Just as candidates came to Daily Kos to get support for their campaign, elected officials are coming to spotlight policy issues and get support for their initiatives. Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) was one of the first to make an appearance on the site, posting about her opposition on the nomination of Condoleezza Rice to Secretary of State. Of Daily Kos, Senator Boxer commented: "I look forward to future interactions with the Daily Kos community. I hope to have the time to drop by here and participate in the discussion from time to time--I value your input, and I thank you for caring so much about the future of our country" (Barnett, 2005).
Since her posts, other elected officials like Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI), Senator Jon Corzine (D-NJ), Senator Harry Reid’s (D-NV) Senate Democratic Communications Committee (SDCC), Representative Slaughter (D-NY), and Representative Conyers (D-MI) have added their posts. Their posts pertain to a wide range of issues, from the Bankruptcy Bill (S-256) to the ethics charges against Rep. Tom Delay (R-TX). On April 14, 2005, the diaries section of Daily Kos had posts from Senator Jon Corzine\(^2\), Representative Slaughter\(^3\), and Representative Conyers\(^4\). Moreover, candidates running for office in 2005 and 2006 are increasingly comfortable coming to the blog to ask for support. These incidences suggest that rather than diminishing in number or interest, the Daily Kos community is thriving, and increasingly become an important forum for politicians and politically-interested alike.

**Overview of Theoretical Background**

Before going into the specifics of the Daily Kos case study, it is important to first delve into the theoretical background. The rise of the weblog can be positioned within the larger context of the increasing prominence and popularity of the online medium within modern society. The rapidly expanding market of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) coupled with their increasing affordability has meant that a greater proliferation of people are using the Internet (Wring and Horrocks, 2001, p. 200). Since the early days of the Internet, there has been growing recognition
of the potential that the new online medium offers for mass participation and communication (Wring and Horrocks, 2001, p. 200). The interactive nature of the Internet creates the potential for an enriched kind of public discourse. Frequently, in the history of communication technology it has turned out that people use new media creatively, adapting them to the ordinary purposes of keeping in touch with each other, and later building complex social networks out of these everyday practices (Sassi, 2001, pp. 104-5).

The enthusiasm about the democratic potential of the Internet has centered on its conversational, communicative dimension. It is in the online medium’s emphasis on words that one can see the importance of the conversational dimension (Meikle, 2002, p. 33). The rapidly growing role of “computer mediated communication” or CMC has attracted considerable attention from social scientists and generated extensive discussions of its possible impact on “social organization,” which can be loosely defined as “networks of informal relationships between a multiplicity of individuals and organizations who share a distinctive collective identity, and mobile resources on conflictual issues” (Diani, 2001, p. 117). In the social sphere, then, the importance of the Internet revolves around its capacity to function as a common ground for creating and maintaining social ties (Sassi, 2001, p.104). The online medium can enable people to set up discussion groups between individuals interested
in a specific issue, thus encouraging interaction and polyadic, rather than dyadic, communication dynamics (Diani, 2001, p. 118).

This study will focus on the weblog as the form of computer mediated communication. According to Rebecca Blood (2000), author of We’ve Got Blog, “A weblog is defined, these days, by its format: a frequently updated webpage with dated entries, new ones placed on top” (p. ix). Such a website would typically be accessible to any Internet user. Blogs run from individual diaries to arms of political campaigns, media programs and corporations. The format of weblogs varies, from simple bullet lists of hyperlinks, to article summaries with user-provided comments and ratings. Political weblogs are blogs which primarily cover political news and politically-charged topics.

The political weblog Daily Kos will serve as the subject of the case study. More will be said about its features and their functionality in later chapters. For now, Daily Kos is an “American political weblog aimed at Democrats and progressives and is arguably the most influential liberal weblog in the US.” Daily Kos stands out amongst other liberal political blogs, such as Atrios, Political Wire or Talking Points Memo, because of “its sheer volume of content on the site.” According to self-reported website statistics, Daily Kos has daily traffic of 450,000 or more, and often reaches over 2,500,000 unique visits in one week. Another standout feature of Daily
Kos is that it is “an interactive site powered by the collaborative media application Scoop, by which user comments are privileged similarly to blog entries.” Overall, its popularity, partisan agenda, and community focus aptly describe the features, forum and functionality of the Daily Kos blog.

With the increasing monopolization of media industry, news outlets that disseminate it, and the proliferation of information, people are beginning to rely on blogs like Daily Kos to serve as their navigational guide. The format of the weblog, its reliance on links, its immediacy, and its connections to other weblogs provide blog authors and readers with tools for rapid information-exchange (Blood, 2000, p. x). In traditional form, broadcast and print journalism are restricted to short, linear communication moments. In contrast, the non-linear, hyperlinking functionality of blogging can tie a story to additional sources for readers to peruse at their convenience (Stromer-Galley and Hall Jamieson, 2001, p. 176).

As blogs rely on linking for interest and popularity, they facilitate two-way dialogue amongst a large number of people who have the choice of whether to participate in any given discussion. As scholar Larry Lessig points out, “The trick is to turn the audience into the speaker. A well-structured blog inspires both reading and writing.” (136). A huge part of blogs’ appeal lies in their unmediated quality (Lasica, 2002, p. 171). Blogs tend to be impressionistic, telegraphic, raw, honest,
individualistic, highly opinionated and passionate, often striking an emotional cord (Lasica, 2002, p. 171). Overall, blogs allow users to create content and inspire community relatively outside the media filter.

Outline of Study

To determine whether the new blog technology has sustained its popularity in the political online community, I will monitor the activity and content on DailyKos, which will serve as my case study. I will be recording every post to the front page of the website as a marker for activity levels. Activity, for the purposes of this study, is defined as participation by members of the weblog, as well as the content creation by the weblog’s owners and authors. The activity levels will be analyzed based on how many posts occur per day, as well as how many comments each post receives. Content pertains to the subject that is discussed within the message portion of the post. The author of each post self-selects what “content category” the post falls under, and these identifications will be used to analyze content. These activity and content variables are available to the public, which makes this study easily replicated for reliability.

To determine whether there is a change in activity and content, I will be using the statistical methodology program SPSS to compare my data before and after the 2004 election. My data will include all of the posts to the DailyKos weblog from October 13, 2003 through March 31, 2005. To investigate my research question, I
begin by examining the theoretical context surrounding the discussion of political blogging. I delve into a comparison between old and new media, looking at the ways that new media generally and the Internet specifically impact the public’s ability to participate in deliberative discussion. From there, I move into an examination of the emerging weblog culture, providing a comprehensive look at the practices surrounding the blog and their consequences.

I then take a close look at the specific political blog, Daily Kos, which serves as the case study for this analysis. Through observation and anecdote, I provide a contextual framework for Daily Kos to support the research that follows. The next section clearly lays out the methodological approach, the research question, hypotheses, and limitations for my study. Using my findings and analysis, I then evaluate support for my hypotheses and explore my research question. Finally, I conclude this study by outlining the implications of my research in terms of online community and deliberative discussion, and offering possibilities for future study.
Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework that surrounds the discussion of political blogging. The first section looks at the impact of television and the theory of impersonal influence as they both relate to the citizen’s ability to receive, understand and discuss political information. Next, this chapter delves into scholarly work relating to media, both old and new. Within this section, I examine the “old media,” its trend towards commercialism, and the way that this trend has impacted journalism. Following that, I will define “new media” and identify its characteristics and differences with “old media.” I will then discuss the literature pertaining specifically to the Internet. In particular, I look at “computer-mediated communication” (CMC), and the “virtual community.” Following that, I will study the political practice of new media, and how it relates to the concepts of “public judgment” and the “public sphere.” Finally, I will conclude this chapter by looking at the possible pitfalls of new media use.

The Societal Impact of Television

Before the advent of new media, the Internet and the blogosphere, societal trends and older forms of mass media converged to create a system of disconnect, disinterest and communal isolation. Frantzich (2002) describes the changes in mass media that facilitated this system. He posits that “the creation of national and
international news services” “expanded the news reach” and “led to more common coverage” (Frantzich, 2002, p. 47). Although this centralization occurred in all forms of media, including newspapers and radio, it was television that ultimately gave rise to “nationalization and the power of mediation” (Frantzich, 2002, p. 49).

Television operates as a one way activity, much like radio and newspapers. The difference is that television has “broad-based networks cast out a message” to an audience that is both “heterogeneous and largely inadvertent” in the “hope that a significant portion would find it appealing enough to tune it” (Frantzich, 2002, p. 49). This inherent structure of television broadcast ultimately renders the audience passive. Television leaves no room for personal imagination. Unlike newspapers and radio, where one must visualize what is occurring, television occupies both the oratory and visual senses. As Frantzich notes, “Part of the allure of television is the freedom from choice. It is a respite from an active world” (p. 50). Television was quickly a fixture in the modern American home.

As television infiltrated modern life, it undoubtedly impacted both civic and political structures. Putnam (2000) in his seminal work, Bowling Alone, describes the civic disengagement and disconnect that resulted from the centralization of media and the passivity of the television experience. Frantzich says that mass media have not only rendered the audience passive, they have also taken away the locality of
communal life to the point where “it is increasingly difficult for many Americans to find a relevant local point of reference” (p. 28). In place of citizen joint action, he finds that “more and more, all politics is personal” (Frantzich, 2002, p. 28). As a one-to-many medium, television is not a tool that citizens can use to engage each other. Citizens are unable to connect with each other to enact social change, resulting in feelings of political powerless and personal isolation. Ultimately, television institutionalized the societal reliance on a mediated source to disseminate public information and opinion.

**Impersonal Influence**

Diana Mutz (1998) believes that this trend towards personal isolation and powerlessness played a large role in the development of impersonal influence. She notes that the conditions of modern life have “destroyed important social bonds and produced alienated, atomized individuals who are at the mercy of agents of mass persuasion” (p. 268). Without interpersonal relationships, which once served as “buffers,” between themselves and the “powerful national media,” the general public “fall prey” to a sense of false consciousness promoted through the mass media (Mutz, 1998, p. 268). Increased television viewership is one of the primary, distinctive characteristics of contemporary society that predicates the creation of impersonal influence.
Impersonal influence is Mutz’s update to the older theories of personal influence, espoused by early proponents of the two-step flow model. The two-step flow model, a theory by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), based on an earlier voting study (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944), suggests that an intermediary group, the opinion leaders, is responsible for the dissemination of the media message to the opinion followers- the general public. In this model, opinion leaders are members of the community, who relay messages through interpersonal, community interaction. In Mutz’s updated vision, influence becomes “impersonal” because it is brought about by “information about the attitudes, beliefs of experiences of collectives outside of an individual’s personal life space” (p. 4).

Her term “impersonal influence” speaks directly to the conditions of a mass society, which have increasingly promoted a reliance on mass media to navigate through issues and information. Because these understandings are not based on real world context or judgment, the general public does not perceive a connection between their lives and the collective experience. A recurrent finding in contemporary social science research is that Americans often give perceptions of the larger social world that are quite distant from perceptions of their own immediate life situations. Mutz sees this persistent gap between individuals’ personal and collective-level judgments as an important consequence of mass-mediated society.
The information that the public receives through indirect association is often tailored to suit their perceived lack of involvement, concern or time within the political world. John Zaller (1992) notes that “citizens vary in their habitual attention to politics and hence in their exposure to political information and argumentation in the media” (p. 1). The steady decline in party politics and the movement toward candidate-centered campaigns is well documented in scholarly discourse.

Accompanying this transition in party politics, “the federal government and its programs have increased in size and complexity, and political issues have also become more intricate and perplexing” (Mutz, 1998, p. 274). Mutz cites the increasing “complexity facing citizens who are involved in the political process” as further reason why they “will rely on media expertise for information serving as the basis for many of their decisions” (p. 272). People in their everyday lives have a lack of information about the political world, necessitating a reliance on media coverage, which is perceived as more accurate in disseminating collective information than personal experience.

Yankelovich (1991) sees the conditions involved in the creation of impersonal influence, and the unseen tradeoffs as being part of a larger aspect of American society, which he calls the “Culture of Technical Control.” He catalogues a list of assumptions that he feels this “Culture” makes about American society. In his estimation, the
Culture of Technical Control “assumes that policy decisions depend essentially on a high degree of specialized knowledge and skills and that only experts possess this knowledge” (p. 9). He says that it “assumes that the American people lack the relevant knowledge, are concerned largely with their own pocketbook interests, and are likely to be apathetic to issues not directly related to these interests” (p. 9).

It also assumes that “America’s elected officials know what the views of the electorate are and, by and large, represent them well” (p. 9). The “Culture” presupposes that on “issues where public understanding and support are mandatory, they can be achieved through ‘public education’ where experts who are knowledgeable share some of the information with the voters” (p. 9). Finally, it assumes that “the media, through vigorous consciousness raising, imparts to the American public the information and understand it need to develop responsible judgments on the key issues facing the nation” (p. 9). Yankelovich finds all of these assumptions not only faulty, but highly problematic as they take away citizen deliberation and erode democratic self-governance.

Impersonal influence, these scholars maintain, results in decreased collective and individual knowledge of political issues. Hill & Hughes (1998) point out that “for any democracy, information is an essential resource” (p. 2). Like Yanklevoch, they believe that one of “the major failings of democracy is that so few people actually take
part in the democratic process” (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p.2). For democracy to truly flourish, it “requires leaders and the populace to discuss ideas and policies affecting the society” (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 2). However, this “deliberative and thoughtful discussion” also “requires knowledgeable and informed discussants” (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 3). When citizens rely on an impersonal influence for information, and the larger society perceives lack of citizen interest or involvement with the political world, it is difficult to have informed discussants. Overall, it would seem that the trends in mass media, which have privileged “impersonal influence” over truly deliberative discussion, have resulted in a weakened democracy.

**Old Media and Journalism**

Many scholars point to the mass media as the cause of the deterioration of discussion and the lack of political knowledge. Therefore, it is important to provide a more nuanced explanation of mass media, and the ways that it operates. The first step is to distinguish the two different forms of mass media commonly agreed upon by scholars, old media and new media. The following sections will discuss the old media, which are also referred to as the “traditional media,” and would include “daily newspapers, television and radio news programs, and general news magazines” (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 3). Throughout American history, the old media in various forms have been charged to help us “define our communities,” and “create a common
language and common knowledge rooted in reality” (Davis, Elin, and Reeher, 2002, p. 8). Old media have also been given the obligation to ensure that people are aware of what is going on in government. Because of the responsibilities implicit in these pivotal roles, many scholars have blamed old media for the weakening of public deliberation, community and democracy.

Cook (1998) points out that the old media establishment has long held the place of “watchdog” over the government. With this role comes the “strategic ritual of objectivity” that old media journalists employ to convey a purportedly neutral tone and message (p. 7). The neutral tone is legitimized by “quotes from official authoritative sources to provide the raw material of their stories” along with “the separation of editorials and news analysis, which suggests that only the former is subjective” (Cook, 1998, p. 6). They rarely rely on their own voice, preferring instead to use quotes to convey a belief or attitude. In short, the old media are dominated by an ideological paradigm that values news accounts that are seemingly absent a reporter’s point of view (Cook, 1998, p. 7).

Many scholars point out that this perception of the news media is inaccurate and misleading, as reporting the news is anything but value-neutral. It is a process of selectivity, which biases the opinions of experts over other forms of information and removes relevant context. Zaller (1992) notes “the information that reaches the public
is never a full record of important events and developments in the world. The information is, rather, “a highly selective and stereotyped view of what has taken place” (p. 7).

The content and context choices made by journalists are a part of a process referred to as “framing.” Framing is “the process of putting the information given into a logical order or context,” and “is not a trivial source of media influence” (qtd. from Farnsworth & Lichter, 2003, p. 91). Framing becomes the way that the old media decide which issues are prescient and worthy of coverage.

Shanto Iyengar (1991) divides media framing of political issues into two categories: episodic and thematic. The first type of framing “undermines citizen evaluation of issues; the second type helps place matter into context” (qtd. from Farnsworth & Lichter, 2003, p. 92). The episodic news frame takes the form of event-oriented reporting and depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances. Contrastingly, the thematic frame “places public issues in a more general or abstract context and takes the form of a ‘takeout’ or ‘backgrounder’ report directed at general outcomes or conditions” (qtd. from Farnsworth & Lichter, p. 92). Because episodic stories tend to have “better pictures, can be told more briefly, are easier to prepare, and are less susceptible to charges of bias- four items that dramatically improve a story’s
chances of being reported, far more stories are episodic than thematic” (Farnsworth & Lichter, 1998, p. 93).

In other words, this preoccupation by the old media with what’s new rather than what’s constant, “denies news attention to pre-existing social problems and discourages solutions” (Cook, 1998, p. 113). Farnsworth and Lichter (2003) note that “if information is presented absent a context, as news often is presented through the fragmentary, brief stories that are the norm, the contexts of those stories are not likely to be recalled or to play a significant role in citizen evaluations of public figures and issues” (pp. 92-3). Therefore, the value-neutral, episodic way that the old media disseminate news not only leads to lack of information; it also disengages citizenry from public discussion and action.

Old Media and Commercialism

The primary reason many scholars believe old media has trended towards episodic journalism is the increasing commercialization of the news. Gillmor (2004) notes that in the 20th century, the big “business of journalism” or “the corporatization of journalism” emerged as a force in society (p. 4). In commercial news, and television in particular, “the push for profits” has “crowded out” the use of the “public airwaves to inform the public” (Gillmor, 2004, p. 5). As media organizations were no longer required to provide news services as part of their licensing agreements, the
public service obligation no longer played a central role in the old media’s decision-making (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 37). News production has since been transformed into a new kind of information profession where market segmentation is emphasized (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 38). Increasingly, news content decisions are made based on who was interested, its value to advertisers, the costs of assembling the details, and competitors’ products (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 38). The public need for in-depth coverage of issues, both local and national, has become tangential.

The commercial environment, coupled with episodic coverage of issues, promotes entertainment news. Citizens who follow the news “are seeing less ‘hard’ news, or stories that deal with major events and issues affecting the community and country” (Davis, Elin, and Reeher, 2002, p. 7). Replacing it are “tabloid forms of ‘infotainment’ as news organizations battle for audience share with entertainment programming” (Davis, Elin, and Reeher, 2002, p. 7). Sabato (1991) notes that sex and scandal are a great deal more profitable in the “old media” environment than dispassionate discussion of policy issues (p. 55).

Sabato says that this trend directly corresponds to constant news production, or “the news cycle without end” (p. 53). American popular culture has created a “voracious news appetite demanding to be fed constantly, increasing the pressure to include marginal bits of information and gossip and producing novel if distorting
‘angles’ on the same news to differentiate one report from another” (Sabato, 1991, p. 53). Gitlin (2001) points out that “the swarming enormity of American popular culture ought to be obvious, for never have so many communicated so much, on so many screens, through so many channels, absorbing so many hours of irreplaceable human attention” (p. 4). Overall, many scholars have come to believe that the old media are no longer effective channels for creating an informed public. Instead, the old media have exploited the public for profit and facilitated the heightened role of impersonal influence, which disengaged citizens from the political process.

New Media vs. Old Media

Many scholars speculate whether new media will challenge the communicative, societal norms created by the old media. In order to understand the context of this speculation, it first important to define exactly what the term “new media” encompasses, and explain how it is different from old media. Davis & Owen (1998) offer one of the most widely accepted definitions of new media. “New media are mass communication forms with primarily nonpolitical origins,” which have “acquired political roles” that “need not be largely political in nature” (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 7). Davis & Owen point out that the new media are quantitatively and qualitatively different from the old media and “do not simply represent a variation” of the traditional press (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 7). The interactive component of new media is often
cited as its most defining characteristic, one which I will revisit in the next section. For now, it is important to point out that what distinguishes old media from new media is the “degree to which they offer political discussion opportunities that attract public officials, candidates, citizens, and even members of the mainstream press corps” (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 7).

One the first forms of new media is often noted to be talk radio. According to Davis & Owen (1998) talk radio is the “one communications format that has become emblematic of the new media” (p. 51). Howard Kurtz, media writer for The Washington Post, believes that talk radio was at the forefront of the new media movement because it connects with “a bunch of people who are turned off by the mainstream media” (Gillmor, 2004, p. 11). Opinionated hosts, mostly from the political right such as Father Coughlin and Rush Limbaugh fulminate about government, taxes, cultural breakdowns, and a variety of issues they and their listeners are convinced have not received sufficient attention from the mainstream media (Gillmor, 2004, p. 10). These hosts are as much entertainers as commentators, and their shows continue to draw listeners in droves (Gillmor, 2004, p. 10).

The primary reason that many consider talk radio the pioneer of new media is that it includes participation of the audience. Listeners are invited to comment live on the radio. Prior to talk radio, average citizens had “no immediate or certain outlet for
their own stories and views, short of letters to the editor in newspapers” (Gillmor, 2004, p. 10). New media have subsequently expanded to include formats such as television talk shows, television news magazines, print and television tabloids, and most prominently for this study, the Internet and blogging.

The public forums created by the new media are hardly “parallel information universes” that exist “independently of the traditional mass media” (Bennett, 2004, p. 141). Because old media have begun to adapt to new media styles, oftentimes “the differences between the two forms of media are a matter of degree” (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 17). While old media have increasingly used new media formats, they continue to operate under their old standards of operation. Traditional media have treated the new media, and in particular, the Internet as a “distribution system” where their utilization is “motivated by the same quest for ratings that drives their print and broadcast business model” (Davis, Elin, and Reeher, 2002, p. 29).

The old media try to “market their content” and brand their Internet presence by “cross-promoting their Internet coverage on television radio and in newspapers” (Davis, Elin, and Reeher, 2002, p. 29). Several prominent papers continue to use the same reporters to write and post stories on the Internet as for their print newspaper, creating an Internet product composed of “shovelware,” a term used derisively to describe “interactive media content that is initially created for another medium and
simply ported over to a website or recycled news” (Davis, Elin, and Reeher, 2002, p. 29). New media are often equally motivated by profit. On the surface, then, it would seem that new media have done little to impact the operational standards of old media.

While commercial interests continue to reign supreme across many old and new media formats, there have been subtle shifts in choices made concerning old media content. There has been a growing conventional wisdom among communication scholars that new media are “changing the way in which news is made” (Bennett, 2004, p. 141). As mentioned previously, the old media are often viewed as a “watchdog” or “fourth branch” of government, with standards of objectivity (Cook, 1998, p. 7). The new media do not adhere to such rules and instead support “a clear anti-institutional bias” (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 17). As such, they “claim to shear away the filter traditional news media have constructed between the governors and the governed” (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 19).

According to Bennett (2004), “new media provide alternative communication spaces in which information can develop and circulate widely with fewer conventions or editorial filters than in the mainstream media” (p. 141). Their format lends itself to a more personalized style of news coverage where “well-known personalities, controversies, scandals, and the bizarre make good new media copy, and conform to
the entertainment values” (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 18). Thus, they are more likely to include an unabashedly biased approach to their reporting style.

Because new media do not have the same conventions when it comes to reporting the news, the “gate-keeping capacity of the traditional press” is seriously weakened when information appears on new media (Bennett, 2004, p. 141). This is “material that may prove irresistible to competitors in the world of nonstop cable news channels that now occupy important niches in the press food chain” (Bennett, 2004, p. 141). Increasingly, journalists from the old media actively seek content from new media sources, thus “creating many pathways for information to flow from micro to mass media” (Bennett, 2004, p. 141). Therefore, while new media may not be affecting the commercial interests of old media, they are playing a role in changing the journalistic content of the news.

**Interactive Element of New Media**

As I mentioned previously, much has been made about the interactive nature of the new media. From the perspective of democracy, interactive does not merely mean that new media somehow more engaging than old media; it “means that information flows in multiple directions” (Bimber & Davis, 2003, p. 6). The new media have “significant potential to educate, facilitate public discourse, and enhance citizen participation” (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 7). They provide mass audiences with a
seemingly boundless array of sources that “transcend time and space constraints of traditional media” (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 7). The fact that the Internet audience does not merely receive communication but reveals information and communicates outward makes the new medium potentially revolutionary (Bimber & Davis, 2003).

While the term new media encompasses many different formats, for the purposes of this study, I will narrow the discussion of new media to refer specifically to the Internet. The Internet’s greatest strength is “its ability to support simultaneous, interactive communications among many people;” it allows information to flow amongst millions of sources at practically the same time (Browning, 2002, p. 5). The Internet, for the first time, allows for both “many-to-many and few-to-few communications” (Gillmor, 2004, p. 25). Unlike older mediums which are more like “inanimate objects that people must learn to adapt to,” the Internet is a technology that evolves and changes and along with its users, often in unexpected ways (Davis, Elin, and Reeher, 2002, p. 11).

The Internet is purposive in that to a very large degree online, “what people see is the product of their choices and their intentional actions of typing or clicking” (Bimber & Davis, 2003, p. 6). According to the United Sates Supreme Court, “unlike communications received by radio or television, the receipt of information of the Internet requires a series of affirmative steps more deliberate and directed than merely
turning a dial” (Bimber & Davis, 2003, p. 6). Internet technologies move users away from being “inadvertent audiences who are broadcast at,” to “intentional audiences who pick and choose both the transmission medium and the content to which they pay attention” (Frantzich, 2002, p. 62). “Web surfing,” or the process of looking at different online content, is interactive, and this interactivity invites more involvement (Frantzich, 2002, p. 63). Choosing to “surf” implies an interest in the information one discovers; there is no such thing as a passive, unresponsive surfer (Frantzich, 2002, p. 63). The Internet returns content choice and control back into the hands of the citizen as it “inherently facilitates wider options and more narrowly crafted opportunities for users to choose the information they desire” (Frantzich, 2002, p. 62).

The Internet not only allows citizens choice in content, it also allows them to create their own. This distinction is what makes the Internet truly different from old media like television and radio. The high cost of old media production place a barrier to entry that is practically insurmountable to the average citizen. Conversely, the Internet is centered on the “conversion of media consumers into producers with the introduction of open publishing and collective editing software- all channeled through personal digital networks” (Bennett, 2004, p. 124). In the online environment, “just about anyone can own a digital printing press, and have worldwide distribution” (Gillmor, 2004, p. 13). This study concentrates on blogging, but there are countless
ways to create content on the Internet, and they continue to grow as technologies evolve and improve. New user-friendly tools make it possible to create web pages without any complex technological skills (Froomkin, 2004, p. 10). Specialized hosting also removes technical barriers to entry and provides centralized locations where readers can find content and each other (Froomkin, 2004, p. 10). By lowering the costs and the skills needed, the barrier to entry is removed, allowing for a more active public utilization of the online medium.

**Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)**

Not only do people use the Internet to actively seek information and create their own content, they use it to communicate with each other. The interactive nature of online technology creates the potential for an enriched kind of communication. The idea of interactivity is significant in analyzing Internet discourse as it is about people not only interacting, but creating together (Meikle, 2002, p. 32). In this sense, “computer mediated communication” or CMC has the potential to operate as a powerful facilitator of creativity and discourse though “the maintenance of dispersed face-to-face networks” (Diani, 2001, p. 125). The enthusiasm about the democratic potential of the Internet has centered on this conversational, communicative dimension.

It is in the Internet’s emphasis on words that one can see the importance of the conversational dimension (Meikle, 2002, p. 33). The rapidly growing role of CMC has
attracted considerable attention from social scientists and generated extensive
discussions of its possible impact on “social organization” which can be loosely
defined as “networks of informal relationships between a multiplicity of individuals
and organizations that share a distinctive collective identity and mobilize resources on
conflictual issues” (Diani, 2001, p. 117). Communication technology can enable
people to set up discussion groups between individuals interested in a specific issue,
thus encouraging interaction and polyadic, rather than dyadic, communication
dynamics (Diani, 2001, p. 118). Through the proliferation of discussion, the Internet
can provide ordinary people with a greater public voice (Wring and Horrocks, 2001, p.
200). This potential may be realized through the Internet’s facilitation of a new kind of
individual empowerment, which is decentralized, egalitarian and non-hierarchical.

To an extent, CMC is egalitarian because it erases all of the society cues like
gender, race, appearance that have traditionally biased face-to-face interaction. On the
larger scale and the individual level, addresses and aliases allow one to both “hide
one’s identity and/or signal one’s preferred, if unrealistic, persona” (Frantzich, 2002, p.
65). Anonymity is a double-edged sword. While it is freeing by allowing messages to
be reacted to for their content alone, CMC can have less legitimacy than interpersonal
communication (Frantzich, 2002, p. 66). Despite the pitfalls of anonymity, many
scholars believe that people use CMC to participate in new and previously unimaginable conversations.

**Creation of Virtual Community**

Over time, new conversational opportunities have led to the creation of a new kind of community, existing purely online. The concept of community has traditionally been defined by geographic boundaries and proximity. The most salient uses of the definition of community in contemporary United States society is “locality, social interaction and common time, with common territory over and above all other emphasized in the conclusions as the most important prerequisite” (Harwood & McIntosh, 2004, p. 210). Physical interaction “facilitated psychological ties between individuals;” “within a geographic area individuals chose those individuals with whom they wanted to be in community” (Frantzich, 2002, p. 15). While most Americans may no longer physically live in a small town life, such a spatial definition and understanding of community still holds salience (Harwood & McIntosh, 2004, p. 210). This spatial understanding of community has been changing as a result of the interactions that are taking place on the Internet.

In terms of interpersonal contact, CMC has considerably “diminished the role of physical location in social relations” to the point where geographic proximity is no longer a necessity for the “maintenance of close-knit relationships” (Harwood &
McIntosh, 2004, p. 209). Increasingly, people are building strong connections online with others, often not grounded in physical interaction. By changing relationships, CMC has also changed the nature of community. Overcoming the geographic constraints, online, or “virtual” communities are built around non-geographically associated interests (Frantzich, 2002, p. 8).

These virtual communities exist in “cyberspace,” which is a not a geographic place, but a conceptual one. Harwood and McIntosh (2004) explain that “cyberspace is not simply an array of communication devices, but a new technologically determined location that can be populated by new communities and host extensions of current ones in electronic outposts” (p. 209). With the Internet, the concept of community, like the concept of space, changes from geographic to virtual. Virtual communities have the potential to bring people together, facilitating the sharing of information. The online medium has allowed people to bridge the geographic divide and connect with each other on issues that are important to them.

As a result of the boundless content choice and creation, as well as new opportunities for conversation and community, the Internet has been seen as potentially enhancing “the public’s ability to become actors, rather than merely spectators” (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 7). In the face of “declining civic volunteerism and social participation offline, arguably the products of transitory postindustrial relationships,
the Internet provides opportunities for Americans to regain a sense of civic renewal” (Harwood & McIntosh, 2004, p. 210). Amongst the areas most impacted by the interactive element, politics has been significantly changed by the adoption of new media into its operational standards.

New Media and Politics

Hill & Hughes (1998) point out that communication is an essential part of politics (p. 22). How information is communicated to the public affects the way that they perceive both the political process and the policy issues. Therefore, nothing in politics, especially in a democratic society is possible without some form of communication (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 22). With communication being so intrinsic to the nature and understanding of politics, changes in the media that affect communication undoubtedly have a major impact on politics.

According to Hill & Hughes (1998), political communication almost always involves four main actors: the public, the media, the government, and interest groups (p. 22). The media is the primary channel through which all other actors must communicate. As explained previously, old media, using the broadcast model, were formerly the sole proprietors of this pivotal societal role. Consequently, the flow of political information between the media and the public became a one-way process (Hill
In this system, information flowed from politicians and the government, through the media, where it was filtered and framed, to the public.

The Internet has been revolutionizing this process by allowing for the unrestricted flow of information. The Internet is used by the public “to access news and political information, most of which was previously less available” (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 113). The public no longer needs an intermediary or “impersonal influence” to filter through information and decide what is the most relevant or important. Not only is there more information available to the public, there is no time restriction placed on their accessing it online. Whereas print and broadcast media gave the public a short period to digest news before it disappeared, the Internet gives the public the time to access information at their leisure. Information no longer disappears, which gives the public the opportunity to connect events and issues, as they can now reference past documents for context. The public is empowered to actively seek the information that they need, rather than having packaged materials transmitted to them.

Along with changes to the public’s access to information, there have been many changes to the way in which political actors communicate with each other. The new technology places the means of communication in the hands of all political actors: the government, the politicians and most importantly, the public. One way that this has
changed political communication is that politicians and candidates are now directly linked to the public (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 113). Communications scholars have been documenting the decreasing time allotted to politicians and candidates on the traditional press. The soundbite and the newspaper quote are shrinking. In place of the politician’s own words, traditional journalists have been putting their own analysis.

On the Internet, politicians can have space to lay out their issue stances and communicate with the public, absent the media’s filter. More importantly, rather than merely allowing the politicians and candidates to communicate directly with the public, the public can now communicate back. Bimber and Davis (2003) note “increasingly, the Internet audience does not merely receive communication from politicians and candidates, but reveals information and communicates outward” (p. 6). The public can give feedback to candidates running for office, and their opinion on issues to politicians dealing with policy issues.

In addition to the direct communication between politicians and the public, the Internet also provides a forum for political discussion (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 113). This is not to say that political discussions did not occur in the past, they did. However, the Internet opens up the forum to a wider audience that is not limited to physical proximity. Moreover, characteristics of the Internet empower people to be more forthright in their political opinions. Witschge (2004) says that “aspects such as
fear of the consequences of politics and its controversiality, fear of isolation, feelings of inadequacy, perceived lack of knowledge, unwillingness to challenge group norms, fear of harming others, and the fear of contradicting a majority all contribute to a general avoidance of politics” (p. 119). Past research has found that online political communication increases the likelihood of a person expressing unpopular ideas due to the “Internet’s anonymity, lack of visual cues, focus on message rather than person, and weakened social norms” (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 24). Moreover, political CMC “facilitates support for ideas that are outside of the mainstream” (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 24). On the Internet people feel like they can express their political opinions in an open way.

**Public Judgment and Public Sphere**

The political discussions that are taking place online in virtual communities, directly relate to the concept of “public judgment.” Yankelovich (1991) believes that the solution to the media filter problem was direct dialogue between members of the general public and with political actors. He uses the term “public judgment” to mean a particular form of public opinion that exhibits “more thoughtfulness, more weighing of alternatives, more genuine engagement with the issue, more taking into account a wide variety of factors than ordinary public opinion as measured in opinion polls” along with “more emphasis on normative, valuing, ethical side of questions than on the
factual, information side” (Yankelovich, 1991, p. 5). Yankelovich’s “public judgment”
is the state of highly developed public opinion that exists only when people have
engaged an issue, considered it from all sides, understood the choices it leads to, and
accepted the full consequences of the choices they make (p. 6).

Yankelovich’s vision of “public judgment” supports the concept of “public
sphere,” offered by scholar Jurgen Habermas. Habermas (1974) defines “the public
sphere” as “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion
can be formed and access is guaranteed to all citizens” (p. 50). Habermas maintains
that when people interact on the public sphere, they do not act in a formal way. Instead
“citizens behave as a public body when conferring in an unrestricted fashion- that is
with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express
and publish their opinions about matters of general interest” (p. 50). An essential
element of this concept is the absence of indirect or direct authority of the government
over discourse. Therefore, it is “only when the exercise of political control is
effectively subordinated to the democratic demand that information be accessible to the
public” that the public sphere wins an “institutionalized influence over the
government” (p. 50).

The Internet can subsequently be characterized as creating a public sphere
because it uses CMC to create virtual communities. Froomkin (2004) points out that in
“Habermasian” terms, the “Internet draws power back into the public sphere, away from other systems” (p. 8). The Habermasian public spaces begin with individuals in “pluralistic, differentiated civil societies” who gradually unite in online communities of “shared interests and understanding” (Froomkin, 2004, p. 8). The Internet makes it possible, as never before, to create as many “new spaces and new institutional forms” as one desires (Froomkin, 2004, p. 8). Using democratized access to a new form of mass media, the Internet, “these individuals first engage in self expression, and then engage each other in debate” (Froomkin, 2004, p. 8). In so doing, they get to form new communities of discourse. As the Internet provides a relatively unrestricted space for individuals in modern society to converse, a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body.

**Dangers of New Media**

Thus far, I have highlighted the potential possibilities and positive outcomes of the new media and specifically the Internet. Many scholars point out that there are also possible pitfalls. Bennett (2004) notes that “while there are many indicators that digital media have become important organizational resources in making these movements; there are also potential problems or vulnerabilities associated with these communication based networks” (p. 124). Frantzich (2002) also notes that while the
Internet has made “contributions to community building,” it also harbors “community-challenging components” (p. 59). Before closing this chapter, I will point to some problems that are created by the online communication and community.

First, online it is just as effortless to leave a discussion or abandon a cause as it is to be a part of one. Bennett (2004) says that “the ease of leaving or joining issue networks means that it becomes difficult to control campaigns or to achieve coherent collective identity frames” (p. 124). Commitments made on the Internet do not always translate into offline actions. This is due to both the anonymity online and the lack of physical interaction. One can say or do anything online without much risk in their everyday life. Online identities can be masked and distorted for malevolent purposes. It is often extremely difficult to match online and offline identities. People may do or say things online that they would never do offline.

This lack of association can harm virtual communities as well. According to Frantzich, “Along with the benefit of being able to ignore geography [comes] the associate cost that such communities also lacked the reinforcement of physical interaction” (p. 8). Offline interaction, then, remains for many the standard for which communities are judged and validated.

Another potential pitfall of the Internet is the obfuscation of reality. Shenk (1997) believes that the Internet has flooded users with so much information that it can
be difficult to sort the legitimate from the illegitimate and the accurate from the inaccurate (qtd. from Hill & Hughes, 1998, p.3). Nowhere is the line between fact and fiction more difficult to navigate. Much of the information on the Internet can be tricky to verify or validate. Also, it can be difficult hard to discern which online sources may have a hidden agenda behind the information that they provide. There are very few real world cues online that would help people decide who to trust. Not only is it difficult to decide what information to believe, the Internet also creates an information overload. People must rely on their own interests and instincts to sort through all of the information.

Because there is so much information to sort through, some scholars believe that people only expose themselves to content on the Internet that pertains to their specific interests. Because of this selective exposure, they argue that the Internet is divisive. Law professor Cass Sunstein believes that “narrowcasting, specialization and the purposiveness built into the Internet do little to overcome disengagement or citizens’ lack of information about politics” (qtd. from Bimber & Davis, 2003, p. 7). Instead, he writes, “the decentralizing, disintermediating effect of the Internet is potentially harmful to democracy because it contributes to fragmentation and divisiveness” (Bimber & Davis, 7).
Not only do some believe that the Internet is divisive, they think that it creates an echo chamber effect within the different groups. As some studies have demonstrated, people would rather “seek like-minded others with whom to talk politics because this is less threatening and more enjoyable” (Witschge, 2004, p. 119). People within virtual communities may lack the motivation and/or capability to forge acceptable compromises with people outside of their political ideology (Frantzich, 2002, p. 8). Since they are already divided into groups with narrow interests and a limited range of information, “there is a greater potential for participates to say ‘either my way or the highway’” (Frantzich, 2002, p. 8). Overall, the Internet could shield from ideas that they may find distasteful but should hear nonetheless (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 3). Moreover, politicians and candidates looking to speak to a larger audience could end up simply preaching to party faithful, as Web sites fail to capture the attention of those with no interest in politics. Many believe the online “narrowcasting,” or speaking to a specialized, fragmented audience, could end up polarizing politics.

In short, those less optimistic about the effect of new media, including the Internet, see a world in which technology enables us to substitute data entry and highly selective information intake for thoughtful discussion and passive viewing for active participation (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 3). To a large degree, the impact may not be
either/or, but rather some this and some of that. As more studies are conducted concerning online behavior, they seem to invalidate some of the concerns over the Internet. For example, many scholars based their fears of “narrowcasting” on research that was done pertaining to traditional media consumption. Subsequent research, while not completely overturning past studies, did find evidence that would suggest the contrary for online consumption.

A study done by Mutz and Martin showed that with traditional media, the “more control people had over their exposure to political information, the less likely they were to be exposed to ideas dissimilar to their own, with strong partisans experiencing the greatest selectivity and independent the least” (qtd. Bimber & Davis, 2003, p. 120). However, with the Internet this trend may have reversed itself. Bimber & Davis (2003) found that “for strong partisans with clear political preferences, browsing the Web is a form of political recreation, and this recreation included taking a look at the websites of candidates whom they opposed” (p. 121). With online technology, then, it would seem possible for conflicting consequences to coexist, with the subtle nature of one consequence affected by its seemingly opposite characterization (Frantzich, 2002, p. 61).

In the next chapter, I will be giving an in depth look at the Internet as it manifests itself through blogs, blogging, the blogosphere, and bloggers.
Chapter 3. Blogs, the Blogosphere, Blogging and Bloggers

The weblog, or “blog,” has been the recent focus of both media and academic discourse on new media. Many wonder if the blog is the new tool for democratic action and deliberative discussion, or simply another online trend. This chapter, broken into four different sections, examines the emerging weblog culture. The first section outlines the characteristics and background of the blog, and takes an in depth look at the political blog as a unique weblog genre. The next section defines the blogosphere and examines the rhetoric surrounding its “interconnectedness.” The third section discusses blogging, both the social aspects and the journalistic ramifications. Finally, the last section looks at bloggers, both those responsible for creating blogs and those who read and interact with them. Overall, this chapter attempts to give a comprehensive look at the practices surrounding the blog and their implications.

What is a Blog?

The format of the weblog is directly derived from the Internet medium. Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, and Wright (2004) believe that the weblog forms “a de facto bridge between multimedia HTML documents and text-based computer-mediated communication, thereby blurring the traditional distinction between these two dominant Internet paradigms” (p. 2). They define weblogs “as frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence” (p. 1).
This definition marks a change from earlier conceptions of the blog as simply "a list of links with commentary and personal asides" (Blood, 2000). The newer definition places more significance on the “dated entries” and the frequency to which they are added to the blog, than on the links.

This is not to say that linking is not important; links remain a primary, defining characteristic of the weblog. However, as the blog has evolved, a dominant format has emerged to organize the way that weblogs display their links and commentary. The weblog format that most weblogs share includes: reverse chronology, links, and “dated entries,” or posts. The posts now shape the way that weblog authors add content, which can be “text, images, media objects and/or data” (Winer, 2003). As material is updated, a new post is added to the “top” of the blog (Blanchard, 2004). For Hourihan (2003) the degree to which they are “post-centric” rather than “page-centric” is what distinguishes weblogs from traditional websites.

Almost across the board, scholars and bloggers seem to agree that the content of the post is “the most important feature of a blog” (Miller & Shepard, 2004). Ultimately, the weblog is a malleable format. Blog posts are increasingly similar to diary entries; a similarity that has led some to refer to the weblog as an “online journal” (Gillmor, 2004, p. 29). Weblog content choices are progressively more often “governed by spontaneity and novelty” and dominated by the author’s personal
perspective and narrative (Gurak, Antonijevic, Johnson, Ratliff, & Reyman, 2004). Blogs combine musings, memories, jokes, reflections on research, photographs, rants, and essays (Gurak et al., 2004). Much like a personal journal, blogs can be about a particular topic, current events, or personal thoughts and expression (Blanchard, 2004). Some bloggers seek to keep online journals of their personal lives (Bell, Berry & Roekel, 2004, p. 10). Styles range from casual and personal to more formal and journalistic (Bell, Berry & Roekel, 2004, p. 10). What the best blogs tend to have in common is voice; they are clearly written by human beings with genuine human passion (Gillmor, 2004, p. 29).

While the basics of blogging are consistent across blog genres, on most blogging sites bloggers can either choose from a number of boilerplate formats or customize their own pages to reflect their interests (Miller & Shepard, 2004). Some blogs function as an “interactive webpage” in which the blog owner, or author, posts regular updates, and readers comment (Blanchard, 2004). Others are interactive in the sense that their posts link to and comment on the other sites’ content (Gurak et al., 2004). It is the particular mixture of links, commentary, and personal observation unique to each individual site has always given each weblog its distinctive voice (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004, p. 1).
Background of Weblogs

A brief look at the historical development of the weblog illustrates its evolution from a list of links, to more of an “online journal.” For all its attention, the weblog has only been around for a short time. Some claim that the earliest blog was actually the first website created by Tim Berners-Lee in 1991 (Herring et al., 2004, p. 1). However, the weblog, as it is currently conceived did not appear until 1996 (Herring et al., 2004, p. 1). The first weblog has generally been ascribed to Dave Winer in 1997 which is also when Jorn Barger coined the term “weblog” (Lasica, 2002, p. 171). Soon after, the term “blogger” was introduced to refer to the weblog author or editor. By 1998 there were just a handful of sites that could qualify as weblogs (Blood, 2000). Many agree that blogs originated as a way to share information of interest (Miller & Shepard, 2004). During the first two years, weblogs could only be created by people who already knew how to make a website (Blood, 2000). A weblog editor had either taught herself to code HTML for fun, or, after working all day creating commercial websites, spent several off-work hours every day surfing the web and posting to her site (Blood, 2000).

In the beginning of 1999, there were only 23 weblogs known to be in existence (Blood, 2000). However, 1999 marked the turning point for weblogs. It was the year that a number of blog portals were launched, all offering easy-to-use editing tools that require no coding experience (Miller & Shepard, 2004). Pitas, which launched in July
was the first build-your-own-weblog tool; it was quickly followed by Pyra’s release of Blogger, and Groksoup, Winer’s introduction of Edit This Page, and Jeff A. Campbell’s launch of Velocinews (Blood, 2000). All of these services are free, and all of them are designed to enable individuals to publish their own weblogs quickly and easily (Blood, 2000). These services made it easier for those without the technological background and skills to blog.

While weblogs had always included a mix of links, commentary, and personal notes, in the post-Blogger explosion increasing numbers of weblogs “eschewed this focus on the web-at-large in favor of a sort of short-form journal” (Blood, 2000). These blogs, often updated several times a day, were instead a record of the blogger's thoughts: something noticed on the way to work, notes about the weekend, a quick reflection on some subject or another (Blood, 2000). Blogger itself placed no restrictions on the form of content being posted (Blood, 2000). Its web interface, accessible from any browser, “consists of an empty form box into which the blogger can type anything: a passing thought, an extended essay, or a childhood recollection” (Blood, 2000).

As the technology and tools became available, the number of blogs began to increase exponentially. Since 1999, the number has increased dramatically: “a 2003 survey found that new blogs on eight popular blog hosting sites increased by more than
six hundred percent between 2000 and 2001, with over four million blogs by the time of the survey and 10 million projected by the end of 2004” (Miller & Shepard, 2004). Blogs also started to receive more press attention. While a search of the Lexis-Nexis database shows the first press mention in 1998, by 2002 there were over five hundred articles referencing blogs (Miller & Shepard, 2004). Blogs have increasingly become a popular staple in communications consumption. Current estimates place the number of sites calling themselves blogs at over 1.3 million, of which about 870,000 are actively maintained (Herring et al., 2004, p. 1). Moreover, as blogging software becomes easier to use, the number of bloggers continues to increase (Herring et al., 2004, 1).

**Blog Features**

Having given an overview of both the general characteristics of the blog and the background of its development, this section will now look at the specific features of the weblog. Hourihan (2002) points out that the format is the “common ground all bloggers share.” As I alluded to above, there are three primary features to all weblogs: links, posts and reverse-chronology. Beyond that, there are some other noteworthy features that deserve a closer look.

**Links**

Links were the first identifying feature of the weblog, and as such, “have often been hailed as the distinguishing characteristic” (Hourihan, 2002). Without links,
weblogs would simply be online versions of print journals, diaries, and editorial pieces; another one-to-many, static communication (Hourihan, 2002). Linking is a function unique to the Internet; it is interactive as it allows weblog authors and editors to direct reader’s attention to other content that they feel is interesting. In doing so, they are also interacting with other websites and weblogs. Full-blown conversations can be carried out between weblogs, each referencing the other through links in their agreement or rebuttal of the other's positions (Blood, 2000). Linking also makes the readers active participants, as they choose which links to follow. Sometimes these are links to online newspaper articles or other traditional media (Blanchard, 2004). In other instances, these are more personal or localized links to websites to which the author refers in his/her entries (e.g., restaurants, stores and other people’s homepages) (Blanchard, 2004).

Through linking, weblogs provide a valuable filtering function for their readers (Blood, 2000). Blood (2000) says that “out of the myriad web pages slung through cyberspace, weblog editors pick out the most mind-boggling, the most stupid, the most compelling.” Weblog linking occurs in many different ways. The first way is embedding a link in the commentary of a post. This kind of link is not restricted and used liberally to direct attention throughout cyberspace. Using the commentary surrounding a link, “an author/editor with some expertise in a field might demonstrate
the accuracy or inaccuracy of a highlighted article or certain facts therein; provide additional facts s/he feels are pertinent to the issue at hand; or simply add an opinion or differing viewpoint from the one in the piece s/he has linked” (Blood, 2000). Links may be incoming or outgoing and can be in the form of a referral to a specific blog entry through a “permalink” which is, the name describes, a permanent link to the specific item (Packwood, 2004). Weblogs established the permalink when it became clear that an unchanging link to specific entries was necessary for citing purposes. Links of this sort do not imply affiliation between the author or editor and the linked subject matter. It is merely a matter of reference or a part of a conversation.

Beyond linking within a post, another way that weblog authors or editors link to each other is through the “blogroll.” The term “blogroll” pays homage to the practice of logrolling (the exchange of political favors and influence) (Marlow, 2004, p. 4). The blogroll refers to the list of weblogs that the author or editors read regularly. Nearly every weblog contains a blogroll (Marlow, 2002, p. 4). Marlow (2004) notes that, “this form evolved early in the development of the medium both as a type of social acknowledgement and as a navigational tool for readers to find other authors with similar interests” (p. 4). Therefore, unlike an embedded link in a post, a blogroll link implies an affiliation between the author or editors and the linked weblog. In most blogging services, the blogroll is “a core part of the interaction,” because it
allows users to be notified when their friends make a post or even to create a group
dialog represented by the sum of the group’s individual weblogs” (Marlow, 2004, p.
4). Networks of blogs evolve from mutually referencing each other on the blogroll
(Blanchard, 2004). Blogrolls provide a link between blogs, inter-connecting them
(Blanchard, 2004). In many ways, to a weblog author or editors the blogroll is “an
affirmation of the tribe to which they wish to belong (Blood, 2000). More will be said
about the system of linking within the blogosphere section.

\textit{Posts}

Another primary blog feature is the post, which is where most of the content
material is located. A post is a self-contained message that is displayed on the main
page of the weblog. Each post is separate and clearly distinct from one another. A
weblog post is distinguished by a date, a time stamp, a permalink and the author’s
name, especially if multiple authors contribute to a blog (Miller & Shepard, 2004).
Some posts also have a title, and a grouping link which places the specific post within
a larger content category on the weblog. If commenting is enabled (giving the reader a
form to respond to a specific post) a link to comment will also appear (Hourihan,
2002).

These features of the post surround the commentary or message portion. The
commentary portion of the post varies in length and issue concern. Posts differ from
chatrooms and instant messaging because they usually center on one topic. Typically this commentary is characterized by an irreverent, sometimes sarcastic tone (Blood, 2000). More skillful editors manage to convey all of these things in the sentence or two with which they introduce the link (Blood, 2000). As a result, most weblog posts are short, a paragraph or two (Winer, 2003). Indeed, the format of the typical weblog, providing only a very short space in which to write an entry, encourages pithiness on the part of the writer; longer commentary is often given its own space as a separate essay (Blood, 2000). Only the weblogs’ authors or editors can determine who will post, what will be posted and how many posts occur. Postings range from personal diaristic entrees to pronouncements about controversial issues or reports of news events (Bell, Berry & Roekel, 2002, p. 10). Posts are often archived. These archives may be organized by thread, which means all the messages that reply to a starting message can be read in some order.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Chronology}

The chronological order of the weblog is another characteristic that distinguishes the weblog from the traditional home page. Using the reverse-chronology, the blog “emphasizes currentness (the quality of being current or up-to-date)” (Lampa, 2004). All posts to the blog are time-stamped with the most recent post at the top (Gurak et al., 2004). By its very presence, the time stamp connotes the sense
of timely content; the implicit value of time to the weblog itself is apparent because the time is overtly stated on each post (Hourihan, 2002). When a reader visits a weblog, s/he is always confronted with the newest information at the top of the page (Hourihan, 2002). Without the time stamp, the reader is unable to discern the author's update pattern, or experience a moment of shared experience (Hourihan, 2002).

The “currentness” component of the weblog has several ramifications. First, it gives readers a sense of immediacy with no effort on their behalf (Hourihan, 2002). Without scanning the page looking for what's new or what's been changed, readers can easily see if content has been added as soon as the page loads (Hourihan, 2002). Coupled with the sense of immediacy, the newest information at the top sets the expectation of updates, an expectation reinforced by readers’ return visits to see if there's something new (Hourihan, 2002). Weblogs, by using the reverse chronology and time stamp, privilege timeliness in their presentation of information, to which weblog readers respond by frequent visits.

**Author/editor**

The weblog author/editor is also known as a “blogger.” The blogger writes the posts and assumes the editorial role in determining which members have permission to create new posts, write stories, edit the navigation structure of the site, or edit the templates (Winer, 2003). Based on whatever the restrictive standards set by the
owners of each weblog are, there can be a limited number of authors or a vast number of authors. To date, blogs have been a medium mainly for individuals, though group blogs are proving to be a smart medium in some circumstances (Gillmor, 2004, p. 31). Most often, the authors of the posts are the weblog owners, a select few members of the site that are permitted to post frequently, and/or comments made by other members that have been elevated to the main page by the weblog owner or one of the select members.

Because the weblog editor can comment freely on what she finds, one week of reading will reveal to you her personal biases, making her a predictable source (Blood, 2000). This further enables us to turn a critical eye to both the information and comments she provides. Her irreverent attitude challenges the veracity of the "facts" presented each day by authorities (Blood, 2000). Lacking a focus on the outside world, the blogger is compelled to share his world with whoever is reading (Blood, 2000). These fragments, pieced together over months, can provide an unexpectedly intimate view of what it is to be a particular individual in a particular place at a particular time (Blood, 2000).

Comments

In addition to the post where the primary information on the weblog is updated, there may be places for readers to post comments about the blog entries (Blanchard,
2004). The comment is the most basic form of weblog social interaction (Marlow, 2002, p. 4). It creates opportunities for readers to react and respond, and participate in conversation (Lampa, 2004). Comment systems are usually implemented as a chronologically ordered set of responses, much like web bulletin board systems (Marlow, 2004, p. 4). Readers who wish to read the comments or to comment themselves may have to move off the main page onto a separate space for comments (Blanchard, 2004).

Overall, the number of comments is generally thought to be indicative of how much conversation is taking place for each post. According to Marlow (2004) “comments serve a range of usefulness, depending on the amount of traffic; on extremely popular sites, the amount of response can render the comments long and unreadable, while on smaller sites a lack of any response can give the author and readers the sense that the site is generally unread” (p. 4). According to Krishnamurthy, the posts that are the “most insightful or controversial get the most comments” (qtd. from Herring et al., 2004, p. 3).

Weblogs deal with the comment function in different ways. With most blogging software the comment feature has to be turned on by the authors or editors, and a significant number have not enabled the feature (Gillmor, 2004, p. 29). On these weblogs, readers may be able to email the blog authors or editors; otherwise, there is
no way to give feedback or opinion. Other weblogs have complex systems of commenting. Most of these blogs require a person to be registered with the site, before they can contribute a comment. A user registers with the site, provides a configurable set of information that may be customized by the editors of the site, and receives back a cookie that identifies her as a member of the site (Winer, 2003). If a person is not registered, most weblogs permit anyone to read the comments. Along with the comment system, a language has emerged around those who read weblogs.

Every site has its own terminology. The term “lurker” has come to identify members of a weblog who regularly participate by reading messages but do not contribute to the conversation (Blanchard, 2004). They are generally viewed negatively by many researchers because they do not actively contribute to the conversation (Blanchard, 2004). Nonetheless, lurkers may comprise the vast majority of participants of a virtual community (Blanchard, 2004). People who comment with the intention of being rude, crass or disruptive are referred to as “trolls.” In the next chapter, I will go into detail about Scoop, an interactive weblog host that has this kind of advanced comment and membership system.

The Political Blog

As mentioned previously, there are a number of different kinds of blogs currently in existence, varying by format and content. This study concentrates on one
of the most recognized and discussed blog types, the political blog. Political blogs are weblogs which primarily cover political news and politically-charged topics.\textsuperscript{12} In the late 1990's, the only places online to write about politics were message boards like Salon's Table Talk or Free Republic, a conservative chat room (Klam, 2004).

However, in 1999, around the time that more blogs were forming around technical issues, Mickey Kaus, a veteran magazine journalist began a political blog on Slate know as “kausfiles” (Klam, 2004). After 1999, conservative political blogs like Instapundit.com and liberal blogs like TakingPointsMemo.com emerged and started to attract an audience.

The aforementioned blogs constitute one form of the political blog, which I will call the commentator-style political blog. The commentator-style blog is different from the campaign-style blog. The commentator blog has a broader focus on the political process; it is often more like a spectator of the political sport than a player, although some may take a more activist role than others. While campaigns and elections may take up a significant portion of space on the commentator blog, they do track other aspects of politics, like policy issues or pre-existing partisan struggles. Moreover, they will usually pay attention to more than one political race and exist after campaigns end.
The campaign blog is different in that it is centered on one political candidate, and does not usually exist after the election is over. The campaign blog is wholly focused on electing the candidate, which means they give out relevant information and organize means of support. The two styles are not necessarily disconnected from one another. Often, they will interlink with each other to create a network that is mutually beneficial.

While the commentator-style political blog emerged around 1999, it was not until the 2002 elections that there was a serious use of the campaign-style blogs. Tara Sue Grubb created one in her challenge to the long-term Republican incumbent, Howard Coble, who hadn’t had a serious opponent in years (Gillmor, 2004, p. 92). Although she did not win, Grubb’s blog drew attention from commenter-style blogs and some local media (Gillmor, 2004, p. 92). Still, in the larger sense, very few people paid any attention to political blogs. It is commonly believed that a year before the 2004 election, no one other than people with preexisting interest in politics read political blogs (Klam, 2004).

However, by 2004, American politics was approaching a tipping point; more people were online than previous presidential election years, and they had the tools to impact campaigning (Gillmor, 2004, p. 93). Lessig (2003) wrote that the 2004 campaign “will include one word that has never appeared in any presidential history:
blog” (136). The candidate that brought the campaign political blog into the media spotlight was Governor Howard Dean. Much has been made about his Internet campaign, a lot of which does not necessitate examination within this study.

There are, however, key things to point out as Dean’s campaign blog became a template for others to follow. It combined useful information about the campaign with pleas for both monetary and voluntary support. It also effectively set up a national network as it linked to other pro-Dean blogs (Gillmor, 2004, p. 96). The Dean campaign encouraged supporters to post their own comments at the end of blog postings, which were numbering more than 2,000 a day by early October 2003, and tended to stay civil and high-minded (Gillmor, 2004, p. 97). The Dean staff took these comments and suggestions and incorporated them into their campaign. Their willingness to implement suggestions helped to facilitate greater participation in the campaign. This participation led some people to believe that Dean’s Internet campaign had formed a genuine online community.

Conversely, there were many who charged that the Dean campaign’s blog failed to reach its potential. They charged that the influence of the online community was exaggerated by the Dean staff. These critics also pointed out that the blog functioned more as an echo chamber with limited reach than a truly deliberative forum (Gillmor, 2004, p. 97). Moreover, many noted that it did not draw much policy
assistance from the grassroots, whereas “a true conversation between a candidate and his public would involve the candidate genuinely learning from the people” (Gillmor, 2004, p. 97). The Dean campaign blog also drew criticism for its lack of transparency in reflecting Dean’s own thoughts, except for the rare times when the candidate posted something (Gillmor, 2004, p. 97). Finally, many cite Dean’s loss as an indicator of the success of running such an Internet-centered campaign, although some attribute the loss more to the mainstream media’s coverage of Dean’s unfortunate scream in Iowa. Nonetheless, for these reasons, many people believe that campaign blogging is not going to change the status quo overnight. As for the commenter-style political blog, more will be said about its sustenance in the analysis of the case study, Daily Kos.

The Blogosphere

The blogosphere is the term used to describe the entire collection of weblogs. Regardless of affiliation, the blogosphere exists because every individual who takes part is connected to others through online social ties (Marlow, 2004, p. 2). This interconnectedness is the reason that the blogosphere is often metaphorically linked to the biological ecosystem. Hiler (2002) points out that the blogosphere “demonstrates all the classic ecological patterns: predators and prey, evolution and emergence, natural selection and adaptation;” and “like any ecosystem, the blogosphere has a life of its own, one that's more than the sum of its weblogs.”
Links are fundamental to the blogosphere’s social ecology and basic to exchange among blogs (Packwood, 2004). Bloggers have posited their own interpretation of popularity and influence within the blogosphere based on the number of links a weblog has in various link aggregation systems (Marlow, 2004, p. 3). Many bloggers use the total number of links to their site to evaluate the effectiveness of their writing (Marlow, 2004, p. 3). The blogroll, in terms of social functionality, is an indicator of interest and agreement. In many cases, adding a weblog to the blogroll is a social dialogue, as some software allows the recipients of the link to notice that they have been added to someone’s blogroll and to identify who added them (Blanchard, 2004).

Dialogue occurs when recipients of a blogroll link then add the referring blog to their own blogroll (Blanchard, 2004). This reciprocal link as a gesture of thanks is important particularly to a lower status blog as it curries favor with one of higher status (Packwood, 2004). Within the blogosphere, then, linking becomes a positive practice where the “production of an outbound link interpolates a blog into a broader system of relationship characterized by forms of reciprocity” (Packwood, 2004). While the practice of reciprocal linking is a common expression of courtesy, conversely, delinking can be construed as rude or rejecting (Packwood, 2004). Delinking can result in a lower status within the blogosphere’s social hierarchy.
In terms of value, while links are practically free in the sense that they little to nothing to include as a formal economic act, they are nonetheless “a medium of exchange and a sign of carefully considered reciprocity” (Packwood, 2004). The blogosphere can be thought of as a market that is made up of forms of relationship and reciprocation, primarily quantified through links (Packwood, 2004). The quantity and quality of incoming links are so highly valued because they direct more traffic to a blog and along with the traffic, the potential of generating more links (Packwood, 2004). Being listed on another weblog connotes both social status, and valued content. Within the “ecosystem” of the blogosphere, then, a “passing link from a widely read blog,” is much more “highly valued than a link from a little known blog.”¹³

Although links are the unit of exchange, of primary concern is the readership. Links are perceived to signify the potential for readership. Increasing readership connotes escalating status and recognition in the blogosphere. Readership is quantified as “traffic” and expressed in “the form of unique visitors, page views, hits and bandwidth usage over a given period of time” (Packwood, 2004). There are services available that use the metrics of traffic or incoming links as a way of tracking the success or failure of individual blogs within the larger “ecosystem” of the blogosphere. The statistics packages that allow a blogger to monitor other blogs’ standing are “the best, most polite, route to attracting the attention of a higher status blogger in those
instances where a direct request for a link may be construed as rude” (Packwood, 2004). The following three tracking services are prominent examples of the way that blogs are monitored within the blogosphere.

**Truth Laid Bear**

The first service is noteworthy in that it uses the ecological metaphor and translates it into an organized ordering system. The Truth Laid Bear Ecosystem is “an index of registered blogs” which are ranked hierarchically from Higher Being, which is the top predator, “down through tiers including Playful Primates, Flappy Birds, Lowly Insects all the way to Insignificant Microbes that subsist without a single incoming link to their name” (Packwood, 2004). Rank is determined by incoming links from other blogs also registered in the Truth Laid Bear Ecosystem. This service essentially creates a catalogue of varying social status and influence in the blogosphere (Packwood, 2004). For registered bloggers, social rank can be a source of intense competition and it is not unknown for groups of blogs to band together in collective exchanges of links to “game” the Ecosystem (Packwood, 2004).

Despite the importance attributed to the Truth Laid Bear Ecosystem by its registered blogs, and the increasing mainstream media recognition of its stars, the system only ranks seven thousand blogs in total as of early 2004 (Packwood, 2004). This represents only a small fraction of the hundreds of thousands of active blogs and it
remains to be established if this fraction is, has been or will be the most important subset of blogs as a sociological phenomenon (Packwood, 2004). However, given the apparent success of particular bloggers and their emergent conversations in effecting broader political and social debates, the Ecosystem represents the best guess for considering something analogous to climate change in the blogosphere (Packwood, 2004).

**Technorati**

Another service that uses links to track blogs is Technorati, started by Dave Sifry in 2002 (Gillmor, 2004, p. 168). Technorati monitors linking; its tools are basic queries that go into a massive, constantly updated database that Sifry likens to a search engine (Gillmor, 168). According to the site in March 2005, it watches 8,084,952 weblogs, and tracks 968,524,853 links.14 The service these tools provide “helps people search or browse for interesting or popular weblogs, breaking news, and hot topics of conversation” (Gillmor, 2004, p. 168). Moreover, Technorati lets users rank their blogs and blog topics not just by popularity, defined by the number of links point to an individual blog, but by weighted popularity, determined by the popularity of the original linking blogs (Gillmor, 2004 p. 168). This allows viewers to see both the most popular blogs, and those that are the fastest-rising.
Web services such as Technorati allow the curious blogger to calculate the number of incoming links from other blogs and, in so doing, make an inference about the relative status of a blog to other more or less widely linked blogs (Packwood, 2004). Gillmor (2004) likens Technorati to a “buzzmeter” that helps determine how fast a blogger or a specific posting “is rising or cooling off” (p. 168). The idea behind Technorati is that the link structure of the blogosphere matters (Gillmor, 2004, p. 168). Knowing who is linking to whom can take a seemingly random collection of weblogs and extract a highly structured set of information (Gillmor, 2004, p. 168). In privileging links as the primary indicator of popularity and interest, this service is similar to the Truth Laid Bear Ecosystem. However, its functionality and scope far surpass that of Ecosystem.

**Site Meter**

Site Meter is the final notable metric service. Site Meter and other services like it, do not track links, but instead look at traffic to and from the individual weblog. According to Site Meter, not only does it display the number of visitors to an individual weblog, it also keeps statistics on the number of visits each hour and each day.\(^{15}\) Essentially, Site Meter monitors readers as they interact with the weblog, measuring the pages they visit and the amount of time they spend on each. Unsurprisingly, while Site Meter offers the publicly accessible statistics tool for free, it
also charges a fee for statistics that are available solely to the blogger (Packwood, 2004). Users of Site Meter know their traffic statistics are available to the curious and so form a secondary text to the blog itself (Packwood, 2004).

Many bloggers will include a link to Site Meter on the blog as a way of legitimizing their traffic to readers. While this practice of transparency has its benefits, it can create potential problems for a blogger looking to link with other bloggers. Low traffic can be an impediment as it may decrease the desirability of linking with a particular weblog. This service, unlike the previous two, concentrates on the specific site metrics, rather than showing them in comparison to others. Still, bloggers have a general understanding of what constitutes high and low traffic. Further, the traffic is in part directly correlated with linking. The sites with the highest traffic metrics also have similarly high number of incoming links.

**Social order in the Blogosphere**

As noted previously, using these services to monitor status in the blogosphere is part of a system of social hierarchy. Such a system has a serious impact on social interactions and the online community. This social hierarchy has developed, in part, due to the nature of the emerging blogosphere. The blogosphere, like every informal social system, has its own order, constituted by the attribution of friendship, trust, and admiration between members (Marlow, 2004, p. 2). These various forms of social
association give rise to higher-level organization, wherein individuals take on informal roles, such as opinion leadership, or gatekeeper (Marlow, 2004, p. 2). Within the weblog community, these positions are sought after by many authors, as they convey a sense of authority that increases readership and ties with other bloggers (Marlow, 2004, p. 2). The competitive struggle to retain these roles results in the social hierarchy found in the blogosphere.

Another possible reason for the blogosphere’s social ecology is the extent to which the majority of bloggers invest time in maintaining their weblog. Many scholars have pointed out that while there are potentially millions of weblogs in existence, only a small fraction of them are updated frequently and receive traffic. A survey conducted by the Perseus Development Company (2003), known as the “Blogging Iceberg,” found that two-thirds of public weblogs created via centralized hosting services have not been updated in two months and are considered “abandoned” (Lampa, 2004). Furthermore, 1.09 million of these have been deemed “one-day wonders,” or blogs that were posted to just once and have not been touched since, while the remainder of the abandoned blogs averaged a lifespan of just four months (Lampa, 2004). They also found that of the 1.4 million active blogs surveyed; only 9.9% contained a current link (Lampa, 2004).
From this survey, Perseus concluded that the blogosphere is similar to an iceberg whose vast bulk floats out of sight and out of mind (Lampa, 2004). Blogs above the “waterline,” those which are frequently updated, widely read, and consistently linked,” may represent the idealized conception of blogs but are not representative of the blogosphere in general (Lampa, 2004). They instead found that the "typical blog" has "nanoaudiences" comprised of a blogger's friends and family, are rarely linked to by other blogs, and “more closely resemble personal diaries rather than the classic link-commentary mode of blogging (Lampa, 2004). In fact, a recent study found that 48.8% of weblogs contain no links to other weblogs at all (Herring et al., 2004). Of those that do, most link preferentially to a select groups of blogs, which are consequently overrepresented in the network (Herring, Kouper, Paolilo, Scheidt, Tyworth, Welsch, Wright, Yu, 2005, p. 2).

**A-List Bloggers**

Many refer to this select group of highly linked blogs as celebrity, or A-list blogs. Scholars believe that the A-list group is a result of the “iceberg” nature of the blogosphere (Baoill, 2004). The attribution of a blog’s A-list status is merited by both the extent to which links and traffic show their success and the extent to which others attempt to court their attention and emulate them. A-list blogs most often have a political focus and appear at the center of nearly all characterizations of the
As more weblogs come to fruition, the prominent blogs continue to retain their status within the blogosphere’s social hierarchy. Overall, “it's not impossible to launch a good new blog and become widely read, but it's harder than it was last year, and it will be harder still next year” (Baoill, 2004).

The existence of an A-list of blogs is unsurprising as they all share a number of advantages. A-list blogs generally have had longer to build up their reputation and their membership, and have provided more output to which one can link (Baoill, 2004). The pre-existing personal networks of these prominent bloggers have also played important role in initially netting them traffic and links. Their celebrity status has been solidified as mainstream media, out of convenience, continues to give them publicity above lesser known blogs. This means that those encouraged by such coverage to visit weblogs for the first time will often start from one of these few entry points (Baoill, 2004).

A-list blogs, due to their established reputation and linking also feature prominently on blog indexes such as those previously mentioned. Consequently, those using such indices to find interesting weblogs are more likely to encounter one of these already popular weblogs than any others. In general, A-list bloggers are successful because they have established mechanisms for reaching an audience, the necessary step
in becoming involved in a debate and having one's ideas have an impact on it (Baoill, 2004). The blogosphere, which allows for almost limitless connections, also creates ecological order where links and traffic privilege popularity.

**Blogosphere as Public Sphere**

Given that in its current state of evolution, the blogosphere has trended towards elitism, many scholars speculate whether it may still come to engender a Habermasian public sphere. Scholars like Froomkin (2004) believe that the blog and blogosphere, while young, “some signs of potentially evolving into a miniature public sphere of its own, one of shared interests rather than shared geography” (p. 10). He sees the rise of a blog culture as enriching the public sphere. Similarly, Marlow (2004) champions the position that weblogs are a part of a massively decentralized conversation where millions of authors write for their own audience, while conversing with each other. For Marlow, the blog has “come to engender a new form of social interaction on the web: a massively distributed but completely connected conversation covering every imaginable topic of interest” (Marlow, 2004, p. 2).

However, other scholars have a more pessimistic view of the current blogosphere’s potential for public sphere. Baoill (2004) assessed the potential impact of weblogs on public discourse, using a Habermas’ public sphere model to provide an ideal against which he measured the efficacy of weblogs as a public space.
Specifically, he noted that the “inclusivity of access, a disregard for external rank, and the potential for rational debate of any topic until consensus is achieved are necessary criterion” for meeting Habermas' model (Baoill, 2004). Rather than achieving public sphere, Baoill and others have found that the existence of A-list of blogs indicates that much of the conversation occurs at the core of the blogosphere with a minority of active and engaged bloggers who post, comment, and link frequently (Lampa, 2004).

These findings signify that the blogosphere is only partially interconnected, and that mass scale blog conversations, “while occasionally intense, are the exception rather than the rule” (Herring et al., 2005, p. 2). Added to this is the fact that the online community relies on significantly on off-line reputation and legitimacy to break into the consciousness of the blogosphere and establish credibility (Baoill, 2004). These two specific findings seem to block notions of inclusively and consensus. Indeed, Baoill noted that the “growing cadre of celebrity bloggers and the intrusion of real-world networking have resulted in an intrusion of external rank in a manner that skews the involvement in, and impact on, debate that an individual can have” (Baoill, 2004).

On the basis of this evidence, many scholars have concluded that the blogosphere, in its current state cannot be conceived of as a public sphere. However, as the blogosphere is still in its infancy, the potential for future development exists.
Blogging

While the blogosphere as a whole seems to lack elements that would constitute it as a public sphere, many see promise in the specific practice of blogging. The term blogging is an abbreviation for “weblogging,” and refers to posting brief entries to the Internet about topics of interest or concern to the author (Bell, Berry & Roekel, p. 10). There are those scholars who believe that the act of blogging shows signs of representing deliberative dialogue and communal decision-making. Specifically, some see “blogging” as an intrinsically social act, one that creates a sense of community. Froomkin (2004) says that blogging is social in that it “encourages citizens to embark on the intellectual exercise of viewing life from the perspective of others” (p. 11). As a result, some argue that blogging has revolutionized the way people connect with each other in online environments (Gurak et al., 2004).

Much has been made about the interactivity of linking. Among its practitioners, it is through the process of interlinking, and on some, commenting to posts, that blogging is socially interactive and community-like in nature (Herring et al., 2004, 3). Hourihan (2002) finds that the combination of links and accompanying commentary creates connections that “bind” bloggers into a community. Blanchard (2004) points out that linking brings social interaction to those blogs that do not offer the opportunity to comment. Bloggers refer to other blogs in their posts, either to something the other blog author wrote about or simply encourage the readers to “check
this blog out” (Blanchard, 2004). Thus, blogs create a social network between themselves through their references links to each other (Blanchard, 2004).

Another social aspect of blogging is the interaction between the blog author and his or her audience. Comments are one direct way that a blog author and his or her readers converse. Commenters can communicate with the blog author and each other, and readers can review these interactions (Blanchard, 2004). Without comments, bloggers still have traffic indicators to alert them to their readership audience (Blanchard, 2004). Further, she points out that because blogging is a process of regularly updating, the author is clearly interacting, through the new material, with the audience (Blanchard, 2004).

In addition, although the main page of the blog may limit interaction, the blogger may individually converse with his or her readers through private email, thereby creating private online interactions (Blanchard, 2004). Some blog authors might reference these private comments and emails from their readers within their blog entries publicly opening up the interaction to the rest of the participants. Overall, blogging offers a space for social interaction. While it is not an ideal public sphere, the blog still helps facilitate online conversation.
Blogging and the Mainstream Media

While blogging has played a substantial role in creating a social forum, it has also played a role in shaping the mainstream media. Gallo (2004) points out that “weblogs have not, and will not, eliminate or replace established media outlets.” They do have the potential to “augment traditional journalistic practices, providing the seeds for an incremental, rather than radical, change in how the media reports and disseminates news” (Gallo, 2004). There are two ways that blogs shape with the mainstream media. The first way involves filtering and discussing the mainstream news through linking and commenting on stories. This first type of interaction is typified in the commentator-style political blog, which heavily tracks the political landscape. It is also true for the campaign-style blog which will reference articles about their candidate or opponent.

The second way that blogs shape with the mainstream press is by creating news. Both the commentator-style and campaign-style blogs have involved this sort of news interaction, although in different ways. The commentator-style blog creates news by investigating stories that the mainstream media does not, or presenting evidence that contradicts stories in the traditional press. The campaign-style blog creates news by offering the candidate’s position on issues, highlighting recent events, and generally offering information that the mainstream media needs to cover a political race.
following two sections will briefly discuss both the filtration and creation of news by blogs.

**Filtering News**

Many blog genres, political blogs in particular, reference news articles through links, and then expound on the story through their commentary. Halavais found that news stories were the most common topics of discussion in a random sample of 125 blogs (qtd. from Herring et al., 2004, 3). Political bloggers scour the American mainstream news, international news, alternate, lesser-known news sources and other blogs for events or issues that they feel are particularly relevant, and then they add comments that generally reflect their political ideology. The blog acts like a filter of all of the news and information that is available on the Internet. Blood (2000) points out that “by highlighting articles that may easily be passed over by the typical web user too busy to do more than scan corporate news sites, and by providing additional facts, alternative views, and thoughtful commentary, weblog editors participate in the dissemination and interpretation of the news.”

Often, the news stories that the bloggers pick are thematic in the sense that they refer to a larger set of issues. Rather than selecting stories that might be sensational, or the most profitable, bloggers chose those that are of most concern and relevance to them and their audience. The blog community decides what it constitutes as the most
important news, rather than the editorial board of a news organization (Lampa, 2004). For blog readers, this gives continuous coverage to news that might only show up briefly in the mainstream press. It also gives issues more context than a single newspaper article can offer. Bloggers juxtapose one article with another on a related subject, which may give each article an additional meaning, or even draw the reader to conclusions contrary to the implicit aim of each (Blood, 2000). The archival nature of the blog also gives context to the issue, as blog readers can go backwards and search for similar posts about an issue.

Not only does the blog give continuous coverage to issues that are dropped from the mainstream news, the bloggers’ commentary adds a different perspective, or perhaps even a challenge to the content of the reporting. Most bloggers use their commentary as a way of fact checking and/or debating the stories that they link to (Herring et al., 2004, p. 2). Blogger Ken Layne explains the use of blog commentary in a classic posting in 2001 saying, “we can fact check your ass” (qtd. from Gillmor, 2004, p. 187). Through their commentary, bloggers offer a feedback loop for these stories that occurs in real time. Blog authors can examine the text in question and “instantly respond with collaborative evidence and links or, conversely, refute the claims made therein by posting conflicting data and criticism” (Gallo, 2004). For
candidate-style blogs this kind of feedback is critical for quickly debunking rumors or insinuations made by opponents.

There is an acknowledged bias to the blog that is not as present in the mainstream media. People read political blogs with the assumption that they are politically motivated, even if it is not explicit. Lampa (2004) points out that “because it is generally understood that a blog directly represents the intent of the person who produces it, a blog empowers the writer with greater freedom to provide colorful, subjective, and political commentary than would be possible within the framework of a traditional media outlet, which has an economic interest in maintaining a sense of detached objectivity.” As blogs are often maintained “by individuals that can exist outside of the hierarchical structures of traditional media organizations” blogs can potentially fill the gaps in public discourse that are not addressed or are underrepresented by traditional journalism (Gallo, 2004). As such, blogs offer an alternative to the mainstream media.

Creating News

Since bloggers do not operate under the same constraints regarding verification of sources, they can publish extremely quickly and have scored some journalistic coups by getting stories out well before they appear in traditional media sources (Bell, Berry & Roekel, p. 10). In a number of widely-publicized instances, bloggers have covered
stories in ways that the mainstream media could not or would not (Lampa, 2004).

During the 9/11 terrorist attacks, blogs were able to provide first-hand, unedited accounts of average citizens in New York and Washington that “otherwise may have been lost amid broadcast media’s more pressing coverage of overarching national security issues” (Rainie, Fox, & Madden, 2002) (qtd. from Lampa, 2004). In another case, bloggers pointed out the racist nature of Trent Lott’s comments at Strom Thurmond’s 100th birthday celebration, and kept the pressure on until the mainstream media took notice and Lott eventually resigned his post as Senate Minority Leader (Lamp, 2004). As one media watcher put it in September 2003, “Never before have so many passionate outsiders—hundreds of thousands, at minimum—stormed the ramparts of professional journalism” (Welch, 2003) (qtd. from Carroll, 2004).

Overall, blogging has renewed questions about how egalitarian journalism is or should be and at the root of the debate are questions of whether blogs are considered journalism (Carroll, 2004). While this debate is outside of the scope of this study, I would like to offer a possible perspective. Downie and Kaiser (2003), editors of the Washington Post, define “news” as “a common body of information” about a community’s “surroundings, their neighbors, their governing bodies, their sports teams, even their weather.” They define “good journalism” as giving readers both “useful information for their daily lives and a sense of participation in the wider world.”
making “possible the cooperation among citizens that is critical to a civilized society.”
They say that journalists make sense of the information and make it accessible to
everyone. Based on the features of the blog outlined above, it would seem that many
blogs do fit the definition of “good journalism.” In particular, they help make sense of
the world to their readers by filtering the news, and creating news when the
mainstream media fails to properly cover important issues or candidates.

There are potential pitfalls to this kind of blog reporting. It creates an
environment that is very susceptible to rumor and innuendo. Online it is particularly
difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction. While bloggers may fact check each
other, it becomes tricky to discern which set of facts are correct. Moreover, most
online sources do not have the credibility or reputation that would allow readers to
trust them as news producers. Therefore, while blogs may have an acknowledged bias,
they are not necessarily transparent. Blogs do offer an alternative to the mainstream
media, but they cannot supplant the press at this stage in their development. I would
offer that blogging and the mainstream press do not have to be conceived as two
opposing entities, particularly in a convergent environment where media forms are
interconnected and interactive.
Bloggers

The final section of this chapter is a brief overview of bloggers, both the authors and the readers of blogs. The Pew Internet & American Life Project began asking about blog creation in the spring of 2002 when they found that only 3% of internet users said they had created a blog or web diary that others could read (Raine, 2004). In 2003, statistics compiled by David Wehlan for American Demographics indicated that only 17% of U.S. adults were aware of blogs, 5% had created or read a blog, and only 1% described themselves as dedicated blog readers (Gallo, 2004). However, two surveys conducted by Pew Internet & American Life Project in February and November 2004, found that blogs have since established themselves as a key part of online culture (Raine, 2004).

Pew’s 2004 findings indicate that 7% of the 120 million U.S. adults who go online say they have created a blog or web-based diary, representing more than 8 million people (Raine, 2004). They also found that 27% of internet users say they read blogs, a 58% jump from the 17% in February 2004, and even more substantial increase from the 11% in the spring of 2003 (Raine, 2004). These numbers show that by the end of 2004, 32 million Americans were blog readers (Raine, 2004). The interactive features of many blogs are also catching on: 12% of internet users have posted comments or other material on blogs (Raine, 2004).
Blog creators are more likely to be, men, young, broadband users, Internet veterans, relatively well off financially and well educated (Raine, 2004). Blog readers are somewhat more of a mainstream group than bloggers themselves, but like bloggers, blog readers are more likely to be young, male, well educated, Internet veterans (Raine, 2004). They did find that between the February and November surveys there was growth in blog readership among women, minorities, those between the ages of 30 and 49, and those with home dialup connections (Raine, 2004). Still, these groups continue to be underrepresented as blog creators.

At the same time, for all the excitement about blogs and the media coverage of them, blogs have not yet become recognized by a majority of internet users (Raine, 2004). Only 38% of all internet users know what a blog is. The rest are not sure what the term “blog” means (Raine, 2004). Those who knew about blogs fit the demographics of the blog creators and readers. Internet users who did not know about blogs were relatively new to the Internet, less frequent internet users, and those with less education (Raine, 2004).

Finally, Pew asked specific questions about political blogs, and their role in the 2004 election. Their findings indicate that at least some of the overall growth in blog readership is attributable to political blogs (Raine, 2004). They found that 9% said they regularly or sometimes read political blogs such as Daily Kos, TalkingPoints
Memo or Instapundit during the campaign (Raine, 2004). They also found that those who were heavily involved with the campaign online by getting news and information, using email to exchange arguments and mobilize others, and connecting to campaign events, were more likely than others to read political blogs (Raine, 2004). Kerry voters were a bit more likely than Bush voters to be political blog readers (Raine, 2004).

**Liberal or Conservative?**

That Kerry voters were more likely to be blog readers supports the findings of Hill & Hughes’ 1998 study that found that Internet activists were more liberal than conservative. Hill & Hughes (1998) expected political discussion of the Internet to be dominated by Republicans, conservatives, and ideological libertarians because they dominated earlier types of new media (p. 4). They saw three potential causes of ideological bias on the Internet (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 4). First, the demographics of Internet users as highly educated, upper-income males, tends to promote a conservative ideology (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 4). Second, the Internet is an alternative to mainstream media, which is often perceived by Republicans as being biased against conservatives (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 4). Third, libertarians and those with similar beliefs find the Internet particularly appealing (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 4). What they found was that people who use the Internet for political activity are actually more
liberal and Democratic than the public at large and hold similar views on such issues as regulating businesses and aiding the poor (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 37).

Gillmor (2004) supports the findings of Hill & Hughes and Pew with anecdotal evidence. He points out that while the Republican Party, as a party of centralization, is more suited for radio talk than the more decentralized, less controlled online medium. He says that the Democratic Party’s lack of unity may have provided one of the openings for political blogging. He believes that there is more willingness to participate in debate in the left-wing blogs than on right-wing blogs, a point he bases on the observation that more left-leaning blogs allow for comments (Gillmor, 2004, p. 99). Because liberal ideology has been more characteristic of Internet activists, it is appropriate to look to a left-leaning blog for analysis of the activity and content of the political weblog genre.

The next chapter takes a look at a left-leaning blog, Daily Kos, which serves as the case study within this analysis. I will examine the unique features of Daily Kos, and provide some anecdotal evidence concerning the way the community functions and the political activities that occur.
Chapter 4. Description of Daily Kos

The last chapter outlined the characteristics and implications of the blog culture in general. This chapter takes a close look at one specific political blog, Daily Kos, which will serve as the subject of my case study. The first section of this chapter examines the context of Daily Kos. In particular, it gives a description of Daily Kos’ defining characteristics: community focus, popularity, and partisan agenda. The next section outlines the author’s background, the development of Daily Kos, and the “Kossacks.” The third section looks at unique features of Daily Kos, and how they have functioned to create a community of users. The final section highlights some noteworthy issues on Daily Kos during the 2004 election. In general, this chapter attempts to provide a contextual framework of Daily Kos to support the methodological approach and analysis of this study.

Characteristics of Daily Kos

The political blogosphere is divided into right and left halves, and Daily Kos is clearly on the liberal side (Morse, 2004, p. A15). It is arguably the most popular liberal weblog in the United States, as evidenced by its high traffic statistics and mainstream media attention. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, liberalism is defined as “a political philosophy based on belief in progress, the essential goodness of the human race, and the autonomy of the individual and standing for the
protection of political and civil liberties.”

As straightforward as the definition may seem, in the past two decades, the term “liberal” has evolved and its meaning has been the source of contention between the political left and right. The connotation associated with the liberal label has increasingly been negative or dismissive. Therefore, while it may be appropriate to define Daily Kos as a “liberal” blog, based on the strict definition of the word, there are other aspects that might provide a better description. For the purposes of this study, there are three characteristics that I will use to define Daily Kos: community focus, popularity, and partisan agenda.

**Community Focus**

Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia, describes Daily Kos as “an American political weblog aimed at Democrats and progressives.”

This characterization defines Daily Kos through its intended audience, as opposed to an ideological orientation. The communal aspect of Daily Kos is one of its most prominent features. Features of the blog technology used on Daily Kos have facilitated greater contribution from the larger audience. Unlike many blogs which read like online soliloquies, these technologies have made Daily Kos a “teeming town hall of ideas” (Morse, 2004, p. A15). Anyone is permitted to set up an account on Daily Kos.

Once set up, this account allows members to comment on the posts, and eventually create a “diary.” The diary is what gives Daily Kos its community focus by
allowing others to discuss their own issues and topics within the Daily Kos blog. Conversation is most often “an enormous freewheeling political debate” almost as if “all of the country’s progressives” moved their “coffee shop conversations to a giant online forum” (Platoni, 2004). The Nation cleverly referred to Daily Kos as "open-source politics," a spirited discourse to which anyone can contribute (Platoni, 2004).

Markos Moulitsas, or “kos,” is at the center of the Daily Kos forum. "Kos is the platonic ideal of a blogger: he posts all the time; he interacts with his readers" (Klam, 2004). Moulitsas constantly posts polls and analysis, written in "skeletal" style so members of his community can contribute their own analyses, cracks and rants (Morse, 2004, p. A15). Moulitsas maintains the blog as his full time profession, drawing revenue from the ads placed on his site. He also has a supporting group of “irregulars,” who serve as guest bloggers. The irregulars are normally drawn from the community of members who regularly comment and who have developed a distinctive voice.

These guest bloggers are able to post to the front page, and help keep the blog active when Kos is busy elsewhere. By allowing guest bloggers the authority to post, Kos been able to decentralize his blog and keep it fresh and updated. Although it is decentralized to the extent that others can post, comment, and create diaries, there is no doubt that Kos retains control over his blog. In the end, he chooses who will be a guest
blogger, and he has the last say when it comes to kicking an unproductive member off of his site. It is this balance of control and freedom that makes the Daily Kos community so unique.

**Popularity**

Another characteristic of Daily Kos that makes it stand out amongst political blogs is its popularity. Daily Kos is the most highly trafficked left-leaning blog in the political blogosphere. In 2004, Daily Kos received nearly four million unique visits per month (Noble, 2004). In terms of linking, blog search engine Technorati ranked it number 8 overall in link popularity in 2004 (Platoni, 2004). One might attribute such traffic spikes to the 2004 election. However, empirical evidence seems to indicate that since 2004, traffic and links pointing to Daily Kos have risen. According to Site Meter, Daily Kos’s March 2005 traffic is roughly two million more than its pre-election, September 2004 traffic and roughly five million more than its August 2004 traffic.¹⁹

This traffic has boosted Daily Kos’ status in the political blogosphere. Increasingly, Daily Kos is becoming the overall most popular blog, left or right. In February 2005, Daily Kos was averaging over 400,000 page views a day, while the second most popular blog, right-leaning law professor Glenn Reynolds's Instapundit, averaged barely 200,000 page views a day (Barnett, 2005). Daily Kos’ status as one of
the nation's most-read Web sites is exceedingly impressive as there are over seven million blogs in existence (Platoni, 2004).

Because of the high traffic, Daily Kos has a large audience reach and a voice that will get noticed, not only by large numbers of politically interested, but by the mainstream press. Daily Kos, along with Instapundit, is most often cited in news stories about blogs as an example of a political weblog. Daily Kos is also a standout in the blogosphere. During the 2004 election season, Daily Kos content was cited by other bloggers approximately as often as content from the Los Angeles Times, Reuters, USA Today, and ABC News (Platoni, 2004). This popularity and attention has made Daily Kos a must-read for those interested in politics and different from both left and right peers in the blogosphere.

Partisan Agenda

Another defining characteristic of Daily Kos is its political agenda. With the unique ability to play a large role in the American political conversation, Kos has set up a clear agenda of partisan, political activism. He may resist the liberal label, but he embraces the Democratic Party. While referring to Daily Kos on October 3, 2004, Kos noted “This is a Democratic blog” (his emphasis). He has set up Daily Kos to as a forum to champion the Democratic cause, and repudiate claims made by Republicans and conservatives. As a result, Daily Kos teems with political and campaign-related
information, sophisticated analysis of poll numbers, links to Senate, House and governor "outlook charts," issue related analysis and legislative bill tracking and discussion (Klam, 2004).

What sets Daily Kos apart from other left-leaning blogs is the extent to which it engages in partisan warfare. According to one its guest bloggers, Armando, “Daily Kos both its front page and the majority of its membership believe that we are in a political war with the Extreme Right that controls the Republican Party and this [George Bush’s] administration.”21 This partisan stance on Daily Kos is different from that of conservative counterparts. Most popular conservative bloggers like Instapundit, use their blogs as a platform to discuss not only their political views but anything else that they might feel bears mention (Barnett, 2005). While most popular conservative bloggers support the Republican Party, very few use their blog to promote activism (Barnett, 2005). Conversely, Kos has created a blog that expressly promotes activity supportive of the Democratic Party.

The activism on Daily Kos is not the same as traditional campaign-style politics. The Daily Kos community members are undoubtedly Democrats and devoted to the idea of the party, but there is also a deep distrust for the party system (Klam, 2004). They are looking for different avenues to contribute to the electoral process. Since Democrats and progressives want to get active in revolutionary new ways, Kos
has championed the notion that the Democratic Party needs to become more revolutionary itself (Platoni, 2004). One way that he believes this should happen is by Democrats fielding and funding candidates for every possible race (Platoni, 2004).

Due to its influence and Democratic agenda, Daily Kos was one of first ever bloggers credentialed to cover the 2004 Democratic National Convention and has raised half a million for Democratic candidates (Noble, 2004). Even after the 2004 election ended in defeat for the majority of Democratic candidates, Kos, along with the Daily Kos community, continues to champion the partisan stance, and has started planning for the 2006 and 2008 elections.

Kos and the Daily Kos Community
To understand how Daily Kos has evolved into a standout, credible political blog, it is important to take a brief look at its creator and community. In particular, Kos’ background in journalism, law and technology and his experience in the Army have established his credibility as a political communicator. Credibility for the Daily Kos community has come from membership by political insiders and politicians, and the level of quality political discussion that members participate in.

Markos Zuniga Moulitsas
Kos, or Markos Zuniga Moulitsas, was born in Chicago to a Greek father and Salvadoran mother (Platoni, 2004). When he was four, his family moved to El
Salvador, then in the grip of a brutal civil war (Platoni, 2004). A good deal of Moulitsas' political imagery on Daily Kos is couched in military terms, very likely because much of his life was shaped by war (Platoni, 2004). At the age of nine, his family returned to Chicago after rebel soldiers passed along photos of Moulitsas and his brother to the family, an invitation to leave or lose their sons (Klam, 2004). Upon his return to the United States, Moulitsas had a particularly difficult adolescence that followed him through high school (Platoni, 2004). Moulitsas says that he quickly learned to say things to bullies that were just confounding enough for him to make a getaway before the bully realized he had been insulted (Klam, 2004). This knack for the insult would later help define his distinctive voice on Daily Kos.

After graduation, at 17, he enlisted in the United States Army. In basic training, he gained the self confidence and assertiveness that are now his trademarks (Klam, 2004). After basic training, he was stationed for three years in Germany where he was a LANCE fire direction specialist for a missile unit (Platoni, 2004). His experience in the Army not only transformed him psychologically, it changed his political beliefs. He began as a hawkish Republican because of Ronald Reagan's support for the Salvadoran government and came out a Democrat, having served with people of different races and social classes from all over the United States (Platoni, 2004).
When he was released from the Army, he entered Northern Illinois University planning to study music (Platoni, 2004). However, he soon joined the school paper’s staff, and within a few semesters Moulitsas not only had his own column, he was editing the paper and freelancing for the Chicago Tribune (Platoni, 2004). He dropped his music major and added three more -- philosophy, political science, and journalism (Platoni, 2004). He then went to Boston University’s School of Law.

In 1996, Moulitsas started his first website, the Hispanic-Latino News Service, which functioned very similar to a blog (Platoni, 2004). He would comb the news for headlines and hand-code the links on to his site (Platoni, 2004). His website attracted a job offer from short-lived Latino portal site PicoSito.com, and after completing his law degree, Moulitsas moved to San Francisco during the dot-com boom (Platoni, 2004). When PicoSito went bankrupt, a Web development company offered him a job, where he learned more about the new technologies that were making blogging easier (Platoni, 2004).

**Development of Daily Kos**

By early 2002, Moulitsas had become a regular reader of early political blog MyDD.com, and soon cemented a friendship with the blog’s owner Jerome Armstrong, whom he refers to as his "blogfather" (Platoni, 2004). Inspired by MyDD and his distress over the 2002 midterm election results, in May 2002, Moulitsas launched
Daily Kos (Platoni, 2004). He named it Daily Kos (which rhymes with “rose”) after his Army nickname. In its first year, Daily Kos attracted over 1.6 million unique visits and about 3 million page-views. It was originally a small website; simply a place to vent, but it garnered attention in political circles. Democrats and the politically interested learned about the site through links from other blogs, and stayed to vent their general frustration with the political situation.

In late 2002, Joe Trippi tentatively tapped Armstrong and Moulitsas to help plan the Dean campaign's Internet strategy (Platoni, 2004). The two bloggers formed a consulting firm, Armstrong-Zuniga, and drew up a strategy memo that suggested using websites for fund-raising and MeetUp.com, a Web site that helps activist groups organize local get-togethers, as ways to organize Dean support groups outside the online realm (Platoni, 2004). The campaign eventually adopted both of these ideas although Moulitsas did not continue to play a large role in the campaign. Armstrong and Moulitsas’ association with the Dean campaign would be both the cause of controversy and the source of new membership for Daily Kos. The controversy will be outlined later in the chapter. As for the new membership, Dean’s supporters feeling empowered by the campaign’s use of blog technology and wanting a similar venue to continue the discussion moved to Daily Kos.
The “Deaniacs” (Dean supporters) and others interested in politics found in Daily Kos a community-oriented forum. In October 2003, Moulitsas had switched Daily Kos from Movable Type, a more traditional blog platform, to Scoop. The old Movable Type blog remained intact at www.dailykos.net, while the Scoop powered version started fresh at www.dailykos.com. Scoop had features that enabled community participation and bypassed the difficult coding that prohibited less informed users from interacting with the blog. As a result, what began in 2002 as a daily online rant for Moulitsas has developed into a pillar of the online Democrat community, an influential destination source for the political community (Noble, 2004). While Kos is the standout voice on Daily Kos, the community of members have also been integral in its evolution into a premiere political blog.

“Kossacks”

Members of the Daily Kos community self ascribe themselves as “Kossacks.” They write under member names of their own choosing. Kossacks have gathered around the Daily Kos blog because they like what Moulitsas has to say; they find him charismatic and thought-provoking and an antidote to what they call the "so-called liberal media," which they consider to have a conservative bias (Platoni, 2004). The term “Kossack” not only references Kos, as the blog creator and center of the community; it also alludes to the Zaporozhian “Cossacks,” independent, venturesome
frontiersmen who organized themselves in a self-governing center at modern Zaporizhzhya, Ukraine.\textsuperscript{23} The notions of self-organization and governance are central to the interaction between members of the Kossack community.

Vitriolic, intolerant or unproductive comments are frowned upon, but otherwise, within the boundaries agreed upon by Kos and the Kossacks, members are free to converse with each other as they wish. Moulitsas sees his role with the diaries as that of a city administrator. He opines, "I have this community that I have to manage. It's like any city. We have the town drunkards who cause problems and town philosophers" (Morse, 2004, p. A15). The charismatic personalities who have emerged as leaders on the site are not inhibited by the unidirectional dialogue of television or radio; instead, they prefer to be “nit-picked, tangled with, and argued down” (Platoni, 2004). As Moulitsas says, "I don't want people to agree with me 100 percent. I have no illusion that I'm any more enlightened than anyone else" (Platoni, 2004). The Kossack community’s willingness to participate in spirited discussions has helped build its reputation and popularity.

The Kossack community, like the blog itself, is in constant transition. In a post entitled “On Community,” Moulitsas outlines the four major stages that the “Kossack” community has undergone all of which he says have coincided with rapid growth: during the 2002 midterms, Bush's Iraq War, the Democratic Primary, and the run-up to
the general election.” He describes how the transitions between stages create “tension as the established guard clashes with the old guard” which ultimately causes some of the old guard to “fade away.” He says that while these changes can be disappointing, they are bound to happen as “online communities are not static,” “people come and go.” What has made the Kossack community so special is that Moulitsas recognizes that the changes are necessary and they keep the community vital and prescient. Of the stages, he simply says, “there's nothing I can do about it, and nothing I will try to do about it.”

**Kossacks from the Political Establishment**

Increasingly, Daily Kos has been the destination source for insiders from the Democratic political establishment. Simon Rosenberg, a centrist who worked in Bill Clinton's famous "war room" during the 1992 campaign and continued working for Clinton throughout his presidency admits to being a Daily Kos reader (Morse, 2004, p. A15). The Senate Democratic Communications Committee (SDCC), formed in January of 2005 under the direction of minority leader Senator Harry Reid (D-NV), has been posting the Senate’s Democratic talking points on Daily Kos. Jesse Lee, the online editor at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, has also posted several times to Daily Kos. 25
Clearly, political insiders see Daily Kos as a way to speak directly to their party faithful, but they are not the only members from the political establishment on Daily Kos; politicians have increasingly made their presence known. As I noted in the first chapter, Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Jon Corzine (D-NJ) and Russ Feingold (D-WI), Representatives Louise Slaughter (D-NY 28th) and John Conyers Jr. (D-MI 14th), along with candidates running for office in 2006 or 2008 have posted on Daily Kos. They visit for various reasons, from promoting their campaign to advocating an issue or stance. Their presence seems to signal the increasing importance attributed by the political establishment to the Daily Kos blog and its community of Democrats and progressives.

**The Kossack Echo Chamber**

One of the critiques of the Kossack community is that has the potential to function as an echo chamber. Most Kossacks will readily defend the right of bloggers to take sides (Platoni, 2004). Indeed, during the 2004 election Kos alluded to community’s “desire to close ranks close to an election and ‘Groupthink’” saying “We should close ranks before an election.”26 He asserted that if someone comes to Daily Kos to criticize a Democratic candidate during the election, they should expect to be criticized back. He even went so far as to suggest that if there was a problem with this kind of aggression, members should either not “write that post or diary” “or consider
returning after November 2.” This post shows the overall tension for the Daily Kos community between uniformly, unequivocally promoting Democratic candidates during an election and generally promoting a forum of free, unfettered discussion.

That the community veered towards the unequivocal promotion of Democratic candidates did create an echo chamber effect for some Kossacks. Marilyn Jones-Wilson, a Kos reader from Oak Park, Michigan says that she does worry about the “insularity” that occurred during the election (Platoni, 2004). She points out the Kossacks “felt so positive about a Kerry victory that the loss was even harder for me than for my friends who felt pessimistic about Kerry's chances” (Platoni, 2004). She found that good news about Kerry was amplified will anything that boded ill for the Democrats was dismissed. As Wilson explains, "even mild criticism of Kerry from posters was so attacked and denigrated by others that it was wearing," she writes (Platoni, 2004). Given that Daily Kos defines itself by its partisan agenda, such indisputable support for Democratic candidates is unsurprising.

On any partisan blog, there is undoubtedly the potential and moreover, the tendency for bias. Whatever this may indicate about the Kossack community, it does not mean that they are uniformed about their opposing party. Since the 2004 election solidified the Democrats’ status as the minority, opposing party, Kossacks have increasingly taken over the role of watchdog over the Republican Party and the media,
excelling at pinpointing what they are doing wrong or misrepresenting to the public. As Moulitsas points out, "one of the roles of an oppositional politics is to watch, to witness, to pay attention" (Platoni, 2004). Because it is so easy to retrieve archival information on Lexis-Nexis or CSPAN that can be uploaded to Daily Kos, Kossacks have taken this role seriously, assiduously turning into “a ruthless fact-checking force” (Platoni, 2004). With the Republicans controlling both the White House and Congress, the interim period between elections should provide Kossacks with plenty to investigate.

**Unique Features**

Daily Kos shares many similar features with other blogs. It has reverse chronology, links, a blogroll and posts. Like many other blogs, each post on Daily Kos has a date, a time stamp, a trackback link, a permalink and the author’s name. Posts also have a title, a grouping link which places the specific post within a larger content category on Daily Kos, and a link to comment. However, it is the many unique or enhanced features that have been incorporated to facilitate Kossack involvement that make the Daily Kos blog so interesting. This next section will detail these features, some of which are unique, and some of which have been taken from other blogs or platforms and assimilated into the Daily Kos culture.
As mentioned previously, the Daily Kos blog switched over from Movable Type platform to Scoop in October of 2003. According to Moulitsas, the partisan nature of Daily Kos attracted large numbers of trolls who disrupted the flow of conversation. He found that Movable Type was unable to effectively deal with the disruption, while still allowing for the community-oriented kind of discussion that he wanted on Daily Kos. He also says that Movable Type was having difficulty coping with his increasingly high traffic levels. Moulitsas saw Scoop as a “robust solution” to the disruption and traffic problems that he was having.

The Daily Kos blog, as it exists now, only contains posts from October 13, 2003, the date of the transition to Scoop, to the most current post in April of 2005. As this study analyzes only posts from the Scoop platform, it is particularly important to go into detail as to how it functions. At its most technical definition, Scoop is “an open source content management system and weblog engine written in Perl, run via mod perl and Apache, with a MySQL backend.” Scoop provides a framework for adding features, by allowing the site owner to store Perl code in the database. These technical features give the blog owner and/or administrator control over the coding and functionality, while enabling the non-tech savvy members-at-large to add content.
Because of the technical features, Scoop has been accredited as the reason for the sheer volume of content on Daily Kos, a facet that makes Daily Kos standout from other political blogs. Scoop has turned Daily Kos into an interactive site, by which “user comments are privileged similarly to blog entries.” Daily Kos is the largest Scoop site, having surpassed Kuro5hin, another high profile blog (although not political) that uses Scoop. In fact, Scoop has been so integral to Daily Kos that its creator, Rusty Foster, became a technology consultant for Moulitsas' political consulting firm, Armstrong Zuniga.

The Scoop website provides a description of how it functions to create community. According to this description, Scoop is a "collaborative media application" that falls somewhere between a content management system, a web bulletin board system, and a blog. It is expressly designed to enable a website “to become a community” by empowering “visitors to be the producers of the site, by contributing news and discussion.” The website points out that “the real power of Scoop is that it is almost totally collaborative,” as it can “be run almost entirely by the readers.” The “whole life-cycle of content is reader-driven;” “they submit news, they choose what to post, and they can discuss what they post.” Moreover, readers can “rate other reader’s comments providing a collaborative filtering tool to let the best
contributions float to the top. Based on this rating, consistently good contributors can be rewarded with greater power to review potentially untrusted content.

While Scoop facilitates community involvement, it still allows the blog owner to retain administrative control. There are several hosting companies in operation which handle the hosting, installation, and maintenance of the Scoop program, leaving blog owners free to focus on managing the content and interface design. Administrators have a very wide range of customization and security management tools available, all of which is done through the normal web interface. The software allows the administrator to pick and choose the tools they want the community to have, and which will be available to administrators only. These tools, and the way they have been adapted have been wielded by Moulitsas to make Daily Kos the unique blog it has become.

**Diaries**

One of the most recognized tools that Scoop has provided to Daily Kos is the “diary.” A diary has the same format as a post on the front page, except they are created by Kossacks, rather than Kos or a guest blogger. Thus, while Moulitsas and several others post entries directly to the front page, members can contribute their own posts. As a result, there is a constant flow of diaries that are created at a speed of up to several per minute. The diaries offer members the opportunity to cast a spotlight on
an issue that they feel is important and topics range from issues, to events, to opinion pieces. The diaries give Kossacks their own little blogs within the Kos blog (Morse, 2004, p. A15). On Daily Kos, their diary will be more likely to receive attention than had they set up their own blog. Kossacks can subscribe to another member’s diaries, much like they would a newspaper or magazine, and Scoop will pull out all of the diary entries and catalogue them on the member’s personal page. Once a diary is posted for discussion, anyone can append comments to it, just like they do to the posts on the front page.

As administrator, Moulitsas set parameters for the diaries. New members must wait one week to post a diary “to prevent abuse of the diaries by trolls.” Each Kossack is permitted two diaries daily maximum, which must be longer than a single line, and are encouraged to be thoughtful. Once created, the diary goes on the list of “Recent Diaries.” The list of Recent Diaries runs down the front page. Diaries are also placed on their own “Diaries page” that looks similar to the front page layout, but features the diaries. Because there are so many diaries created daily (anywhere from 200 to 500), Kossacks are discouraged from being repetitive. Posting the same diary entry twice may be cause for being banned from the Daily Kos blog. For longer diaries, there is an extended entry function that allows for less clutter.
When members of the community like a diary, they can recommend it. The “recommend this diary” button is featured on every diary entry. The most popular diaries are featured prominently in the “Recommended Diaries” section. Promotion to this section depends on how many members decide to recommend the diary. There is no set standard for how many recommends it will take to be promoted. It is subject to how much activity there is on the site at the time of the entry, and how many recommends other diaries have received. The diaries that receive the top number of recommends, no matter what the number, are put in the “Recommended Diaries” section. They can fall out of this section as soon as another diary receives more recommends than they have and takes their spot. This means some diaries can stay in this section for days and others for hours. It is important to note, these are not necessarily the best written diaries on Daily Kos, only the most popular. If a diary is especially noteworthy, it may be promoted to the front page of Daily Kos by Moulitsas or an irregular.

The diaries that get the most recognition are those written in a distinctive voice, those written by high profile Kossacks, and those pertaining to an interesting issue. According to the Daily Kos community norms, there are certain casual categories that most diaries fall under.\textsuperscript{47} The first is “breaking news” where people write about ongoing issues which they think the community at large would be interested in or
something that just happened. Another category is “analysis of political issues or news” which includes topics like specific bills, Congressional hearings and in-depth analysis of mainstream media coverage. The category, “personal stories of political involvement,” is fairly self explanatory as are the categories” general interest” and “humor.”

There are also three categories, “diaries about diaries,” “dairies analyzing diaries” and “diaries about the community,” that feature reflection that is specifically focused on the Daily Kos blog and community. In a category of its own, there is the very popular “Cheers and Jeers” diary run by a specific user that offers highs and lows of the day and invites others to post their own highs and lows. More will be said about this section in a late chapter. The categories of diaries that are discouraged are those which quote sources, but don’t add their own commentary, or those that fully quote an entire article. Personal attacks and advertisements are also frowned upon.

A related feature to the diary is the open thread, which is another way that a Kossack can interact outside one of Kos or the guest bloggers’ posts. An open thread is a post on the main page. It is sometimes posted by Kos, and other times from a member account simply entitled “openthread,” or earlier, “ct.” Within the open thread, Kossacks are free to discuss anything they choose, much like a diary. However, unlike
a diary, there is no length requirement, so the open thread is the place that people highlight an interesting link, promote their diary, or make a short comment.

**Tailored Comment Viewing and the Ratings System**

Another feature of the Scoop technology that gives the Daily Kos community control over their content is the tailored comment viewing. At the bottom of each post, Scoop allows Kossack to determine how they will view the comments the post receives. There are several options that allow readers to make it easier to read and follow a discussion: Display: Minimal, Flat (default), Threaded, Nested and Dynamic. Of the 4, minimal just shows the comment names in a nested format. The other three show more information. “Flat” and “nested” show the entire body of the comments, in either a flat format, straight down the side of the web page or a nested format, which indents the comments based on what they are replying to. The threaded option shows the comments in a nested format, with any comments that are replies to other comments in a minimal format. In addition, dynamic mode allows readers to expand and collapse comment and threads without refreshing the entire page.

Tangential to the tailored comment viewing, Daily Kos has a complex ratings system that surrounds posting and commenting. Such a system is not unique; Slashdot uses a very similar technology called Slashcode that facilitates the same kind of structure. What makes Scoop and Slashdot effective is that the user community is
recruited to assist in rating the comments (Froomkin, 2004, p. 13). Every comment posted to Slashdot carries a rating designed to reflect the community’s discussions (Froomkin, 2004, p. 13). Readers can rate each other's postings so that the incisive entries get highlighted and the trollish ones sink to the bottom (Platoni, 2004). If people get too obnoxious, their comments can be eliminated by a vote of community members (Morse, 2004, p. A15).

Ratings are meant to reflect an evaluation of behavior, not of agreement as users are encouraged not to rate comments poorly simply on the basis of disagreeing with another user's perspective. Low ratings are meant for comments with language that is rude, abusive, insulting or otherwise offensive. As pastordan, a popular member on Daily Kos pointed out in his diary “Suggested DKos Community Norms,” “This is a self-policing community, and we covenant with one another to make this board a place where all voices can be heard without fear of ridicule, hostility, or overtly hurtful responses.” Clearly, the ranking system was set up as a way to expunge intolerance or unproductiveness, but Kos and the Kossacks are aware that it may also be used as a mechanism for getting rid of dissention.

To avoid the latter usage of the ranking system, pastordan explained what the ranking numbers mean. The ranking scale ranges from 0 to 4. A “4” or “excellent” means the comment is superb and is generally given to comments that are particularly
insightful, informative, moving, or humorous. The “3” or “good” rank is for above-average comments, not amazing, but still worthwhile. A “2” or “marginal” is for a comment which did not add much to the conversation. The 2 rank serves as a warning that the receiving member may want to reconsider adding such comments in the future. A “troll-rated” comment was originally designated as a “1,” although Kos has since changed “1” to mean “unproductive” to the conversation. The “0” rank is now assigned to the “troll-rated” comments, which are those basically devoid of content, add nothing to the conversation, and/or are offensive and serve no other purpose than to sow hurt, confusion and dissent among the posters. Comments that fall below an average ranking of "1" become hidden comments, meaning they disappear off the thread.

**Trusted User**

Based on this rating system, members can be elevated to the “trusted user” status. According to pastordan, trusted users can see hidden comments, and are allowed to either rate this comment down to keep it off the board, or to give it a higher rating so it remains visible, if this helps the conversation. Moreover, only trusted users may give 0s. A half-dozen of the site's most trusted users, who rose from the ranks by keeping particularly eloquent diaries, serve as "guest bloggers" who take the lead on posting over the weekends or while Moulitsas is away (Platoni, 2004). This system
gives Kos the relief from having to post constantly, but it also has effected a slight
diffusion of power and a feeling that it's the community, not him, that sets the agenda
(Platoni, 2004). It also ensures that the site is continuously updated and fresh.

Trusted users gain their status by receiving consistently high comment
ratings. The combined total of ratings a member receives for their diaries and
comments is referred to as “mojo.” When a member’s comments are rated by others,
those ratings are combined into a weighted average where newer comments count
more than older ones. This average roughly represents the expected rating of a
member’s next comment. The higher rated a member’s comments are, the more "mojo"
they have. The combined total "mojo" score is never given; the only “mojo” marker is
whether or not one the member has become a "trusted user.” Conversely, if enough of a
user’s comments are rated below 1, that user becomes "untrusted," which means that
respected members of the community have repeatedly indicated that the member’s
input is offensive, content-free, or merely intended to annoy others.

As “mojo” is highly sought after, people have started to add a comment to their
diary know as a “tip jar.” Because a diary cannot be rated in itself, the diaries author
appends a comment that other members can use to rate the diary in lieu of an official
diary ratings system. The tip jar, although commonly used, has been a source of
contention for members of the Daily Kos community. Some Kossacks feel that tip jars
are crass will not use them or rate others’ tip jars. Others see the tip jar as a reward for
the person for writing a diary they liked, particularly when the reader doesn't have the
time or inclination to add a comment saying so.

**dKosopedia**

Another community feature that helps make the Daily Kos blog unique is the
dKosopedia, which was started in April of 2004. The dKosopedia is a collaborative
information clearinghouse available for open editing, which is the Daily Kos
community’s attempt to build a political encyclopedia.\(^52\) The dKosopedia is written
from a the same left/progressive/liberal/Democratic point of view that Daily Kos is
written from, but makes an effort to fairly acknowledge the other side's.\(^53\) As of April
2005, the dKosopedia consists of 2805 articles.

Along the side of the page is a list of links that point to source, the page’s
history, the changes that have been made, all of which lend to the open source style of
collaboration. It is broken into six different components, although members continue
to change the format and layout. The first section is “issues,” which is broken into
“guns” and “butter.” “Guns” refers to the militaristic, international aspects of politics
while “butter” refers more to domestic policies. The second section is a list of hot
topics being discussed on Daily Kos.
The third section is “projects.” Amongst these projects is the “Kossary,” a glossary of political terms and web acronyms to help decipher online political conversations. Another project is creating positions and strategies for Democratic candidates. The fourth section is a comprehensive reference section that is further divided into nine smaller categories: United States Government, Political Parties- US, Media, Elections, Polling, Documents, People, Timeline and Other Countries.

Under each subdivision, there are further headings that help narrow the focus and point the reader in the right direction. The last two sections are features. One features articles from candidates, although in April of 2005 none were listed. The other features an issue related article, with a host of links to further explain the issue.

By constructing dKosopedia, Moulitsas and the Daily Kos community have created a source for progressives to pool their knowledge and come up with a collectively written narrative for the Democratic Party.

**Personal Pages**

To track their activity within the Daily Kos community, each Kossack has his or her own member page. The page consists of several subsets: “diary,” “comments,” “ratings,” “subscription,” and “my profile.” The “diary” subset displays the recent diaries that the member created. How far back the diaries are archived depends on how many diaries the Kossack produced. As there is limited space available on the Daily
Kos servers, archiving all diaries ever produced is nearly impossible. The next subset displays the most recent comments that the Kossack wrote. Each comment citation shows it title (if it has one), its ratings from other Kossacks, the number of replies received, the date it was posted and what original post it was attached to. Clicking on the comment’s title brings the member to the specific location of the comment within a post, while clicking of the post title brings the user back to the beginning of the post. Again, like with diaries, older comments expire based on the amount created. Both the diary and comment archival allow Kossacks to return to their postings to continue to engage in conversations as time permits.

The “comment” subset also allows the member to search through the Daily Kos blog, using specific search terms. This search is the easiest way for a Kossack to determine whether another diary exists on a potential topic. The search can be narrowed by type of post (diary, post on front page, comment), author, and section. While I will go into more detail in the next chapter, it is important to note that posts are assigned to a section on Daily Kos based on preexisting category groupings, determined by Moulitsas as administrator. Another way to search Daily Kos is to select a section and sort through all of the posts (not diaries) relating to that category.

The “ratings” subset shows all of the ratings that the user has ascribed to posts that he or she has read. The ratings citation contains the title of the comment, which is
also its link, the average of the ratings given to the comment, the rating given by the
member, the date the comment was posted and the date that the rating was given. The
diaries, the comments and the ratings are available to the public. Anyone can click on
the author of a post or diary which will lead them to an abbreviated form of the
member’s page. Thus, members are not only publicly accountable for the content they
produce; they are accountable for the way they judge their peers.

Both the “subscription” and the “my profile” subsets are more logistical than
the previous three, which deal more with the interactive features. The subscription
subset indicates to the member whether they are subscribed to the Daily Kos blog. A
subscription involves paying a nominal fee on a monthly or yearly basis. Moulitsas
covers most of his expenses by selling ads on his blog, mostly for political candidates
and timely political books. Subscribers pay the fee to turn off the ads.

The “my profile” subset allows the Kossack to decide what personal items will
be shown to the public. Members are invited to give their email address, a link to a
home page, a bio, and a comments signature. The comments signature will run at the
department of all of the comments that the member makes. Most often, the signature is a
pithy quote of some sort or a link. The “my profile” is also where the member decides
how they will display their comments (nested, flat, etc). It is also where the member
decides upon user preferences such as how many comments are displayed per page, what time zone the user is from and what password is used to login to the blog.

While not contained in the member page, there is one other feature that is customized to the Kossack’s preferences, the “hotlist.” There are different ways to add to the hotlist, depending on the two primary sections. The first section is a list of all of the posts and diaries that the member has added. To add a post or diary, a member clicks on a small icon next to the post’s title. Once added, the most recent post is placed at the top of the list. The second section is a dairy watchlist, which tracks the diaries of individual users.

A member can add another member’s diaries to their hotlist by clicking the “subscribe” link underneath the author’s name. The hotlist then updates the number of diaries that the subscribed member creates. This not only allows the Kossack to look through the diaries at their leisure, it also ensures that they will not miss a diary entry of interest if it is not on the recommended diaries list. Overall, these personalized features allow Kossacks to engage the blog community and keep track of both their own activity and the activities of others of interest to them.

**Election 2004**

Having described the features on Daily Kos that helped facilitate community, this section will now highlight some of the topics that were the focus of their
discussion. As I briefly pointed out earlier, there are a wide variety of issues that the Kossack community pays attention to at any given point. However, because the blog has a self-ascribed activist, Democratic agenda, the 2004 election was a subject that the community could converge and focus on, while still maintaining other interests. For the purposes of this study, then, the observations in the section will concentrate specifically on the discussions surrounding the 2004 election. In particular, this section will spotlight the new activist electoral strategy, the “Kos dozen,” the Kossacks’ rapid response, two controversies surrounding the Daily Kos blog, and the question of regulating the political blogosphere.

**Strategy**

As I pointed out earlier in the chapter, the Kossack community does not generally subscribe to the traditional approach to campaigning. Many of the activists on Daily Kos had experienced the Dean campaign’s groundbreaking blend of technology and grassroots. While the strategy ultimately failed for Dean, his supporters retained the belief that it was a better, more inclusive approach. On Daily Kos, the Dean campaign’s empowering approach and blogging technologies have converged to create a new kind of activist.

These new activists believe that employing rapid response techniques, smart use of technology, constant two-way communication with the voters and grassroots
fundraising is critical in ensuring electoral success (Klam, 2004). Consequently, they prefer contributing the process in a more decentralized, “open source” manner, as opposed to the establishment’s top-down, command-and-control way of campaigning. The difference between these two approaches has been a source of tension between the Kossack community and the Democratic Party campaign establishment.

During the 2004 elections, Moulitsas and members of the Daily Kos community were highly critical of both the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC). Both committees have long been the support system for Democratic candidates by providing money, expert advice and technical assistance. Kossacks found fault with the way these groups made decisions about candidates. They believed that the DCCC in particular was abandoning some viable candidates, especially liberal ones, and leaving them to "flail around" (Klam, 2004).

The DCCC protested that it had only so much money to go around while Moulitsas and other Kossacks alleged that the establishment was putting their money only on safe bets, leaving everyone else to fail (Platoni, 2004). In one specific case, DCCC was slow to react when a long shot candidate’s Republican opponent suddenly dropped out of the race. Conversely, the Kossack community immediately started fundraising for the candidate, raising $40,000 within a couple of days (Klam, 2004).
This example illustrates that the Daily Kos community has developed an entirely new electoral strategy; one that is relatively divorced from the resources or politics of the Democratic Party campaign arm.

For the Kossack community, this new strategy means backing candidates in as many races as possible, particularly against “safe incumbents” who often go unchallenged. As they see it, these seemingly impossible insurgency campaigns are successful even if the challenger does not defeat the incumbent. The campaigns increase the challenger’s name recognition for future races and force the safe incumbent to use their time and money defending their own seat, rather than helping out party members in closer races. They believe that the ripple effect of removing money and support from closer races can lead to a net gain for Democrats.

New activists also point out that running a candidate in congressional races helps support the Democratic ticket, from the presidential candidates to those running for the state legislature. It helps to identify the Democratic activists in the district, and lays the foundation for the Democratic message. For these activists, failing to run candidates means that Democrats are failing to challenge Republican’s message or their characterization of Democrats. Ultimately, what is important to the new activists is winning as many races as possible. On Daily Kos, this approach has attracted a lot
of attention and solicitations of support, particularly from candidates without the backing of party establishment.

**Kos Dozen**

In the 2004 election, the solicitations of support from candidates led to the creation of the “Kos Dozen.” The “Kos Dozen,” were actually fifteen congressional candidates deliberately selected by Moulitsas because they were not receiving significant financial support from other sources. The candidates who were expected to be competitive were, by and large, already being funded by the DNC, DCCC, and other national and regional organizations. Thus, the selection of candidates reflected the Kossack strategy for contesting every seat, even the ones that were not expected to be in contention.

To spotlight attention to their races, Moulitas regularly posted campaign updates and highlights from the “Kos Dozen” on the front page of Daily Kos. He encouraged members of the Daily Kos community to volunteer their time and/or expertise to the candidate’s campaigns. He also linked to the candidate’s websites and urged the Daily Kos community to donate whatever money they could. In doing so, he turned Daily Kos into a formidable revenue generator for his candidates; often these online donors did not even share a home state with the Kos candidate. By the end of
the 2004 campaign cycle, his readers had donated more than a half million dollars to the "Kos Dozen."

Ultimately, all of these candidates lost, some by a large margin. For example, Jeff Newberry in Missouri drew a disappointing 28 percent of the vote against Representative Roy Blunt (R), and Jeff Seeman in Ohio netted a mere 33 percent against Representative Ralph Regula (R). Many conservative blogs had a field day with the “Kos Dozen's” failure rate, saying that Moulitsas “may have learned how to raise money, but not how to pick candidates worthy of being supported with it” (Platoni, 2004). One blogger on the conservative Free Republic wrote, "The missing element in the ‘Kos Dozen’ was sound, basic political judgment, informing the decisions of who to fund, and in whom donors could place their trust. Mastery of the mechanisms of netroots mobilization is a different thing from mastery of the methods" (Platoni, 2004).

Moulitsas was also attacked by members of the political establishment. Stuart Rothenberg, writing in the DC insider magazine Roll Call said that bloggers like Daily Kos “may like the idea of beating up a high-profile Republican incumbent even though there is no chance of defeating him or her” but “the DCCC doesn't need advice from pie-in-the-sky idealists who think that every idea they have is a new one and every new idea is good” (Rothenberg, 2005). He went on to add that most of the races “were
unwinnable from day one for the Democrats, so raising cash for those challengers was about as useful as flushing money down the toilet” (Rothenberg, 2005). Overall, critics saw the electoral failure of the “Kos Dozen” as the failure of the new, activist strategy.

Moulitsas, members of the Daily Kos community, and similar left-leaning bloggers saw the losses differently. They countered that each Democratic challenger in a previously uncontested district paved the way for future races (Platoni, 2004). For example, between Tom Delay in Texas and Marilyn Musgrave in Colorado, the seed money provided by Kossacks’ fundraising “tied up well over ten times as much Republican money in return, and kept two of the party’s most prolific fundraisers campaigning in their own districts for several weeks each, rather than raising money for other candidates across the country, as they had in past elections.”

Further, at least two of the “Kos Dozen” candidates came exceptionally close to winning what would have been significant upsets. Four of the candidates would have won had thirty thousand votes swung the other way (Platoni, 2004). Without the help of the Daily Kos community, Moulitsas points out that these campaigns would have never been close (Milder, 2005). Ultimately, the point for Moulitsas and the Kossacks is not that the “Kos Dozen” lost, but that they ran at all.
Rapid Response

As part of the new electoral strategy, the Daily Kos community set up a rapid response project in the dKosopedia. It was created to “knock down GOP talking points as they happen.” During the 2004 election, the rapid response was primarily devoted to debunking Republican rumors and innuendos about Kerry. They challenged rumors about Kerry’s legislative voting record, his military service, his support for the war and the troops, and his ineffectiveness as a Senator. In their challenges their offered not only facts, but short talking points and counterattacks against Republicans.

While the Daily Kos community might not have seen their Kerry rapid response translate into measurable electoral success, they did have some notable achievements during the campaign season. One rapid response effort focused on the Sinclair Broadcast Group who gained notoriety by ordering its 62 local stations to broadcast an uninterrupted anti-Kerry film, Stolen Honor: Wounds that Never Heal, a few days before the November 2, 2004 general election. Those 62 stations included affiliates of all six major commercial broadcast networks in the major battleground states of Florida, Ohio, Wisconsin, Nevada and Pennsylvania.

Outraged members of the Daily Kos community were the first to organize a boycott of Sinclair's advertisers (Platoni, 2004). The company's stock began to sink, causing investors to complain (Platoni, 2004). As a result, Sinclair's attempt to force
its stations to broadcast the partisan piece against Kerry collapsed, and a more "balanced" piece was shown in its place. Following the Stolen Honor scandal, Kossacks started to build a comprehensive database of information on Sinclair that they maintained through the election.

During the debates, the Daily Kos community was particularly effective in countering points made by Bush and Cheney. For example, when Dick Cheney claimed during the vice-presidential debate that he had not met Senator John Edwards until that evening, a Kossack unearthed TV footage of the two men together at a 2001 prayer breakfast and loaded it onto the blog (Platoni, 2004). Kossacks also responded with humor. Campaign events provided more opportunities for Kossacks to mobilize rapid response. After a Kossack realized that a Bush ad showing the president speaking to an audience of soldiers had been altered to make it appear that the crowd was full of military personnel, the Bush campaign had to apologize (Platoni, 2004). The Kossacks’ rapid responses did not ultimately change the outcome of the election. They did, however, aid Democrats in their day-to-day campaign warfare with Republicans.

**Controversies**

The Republican Party and their associates were not the only ones embroiled in controversy the 2004 campaign cycle. Moulitsas, owner and creator of Daily Kos was
involved in two major controversies. The first scandal centered on some incendiary comments he made, and the second pertained to his consulting firm’s role in the campaigns he promoted on Daily Kos.

**Mercenaries Comment**

On April 1, 2004, responding to the murder of four American contractors in Falluja, Moulitsas wrote, “I feel nothing over the death of the mercenaries [sic]. They are there to wage war for profit. Screw them" (Barnett, 2005). He was writing in response to a Kossack who wondered in the comment section whether contractors deserved the same respect as American soldiers (Klam, 2004). Moulitsas later attributed his remarks to anger over the fact that the contractors in Fallujah were given more attention than the five soldiers who were killed on the same day, as well as to childhood memories of warfare in El Salvador.61

At the time of this outburst, Kos was using his blog to generate advertising revenue (Barnett, 2005). Within hours of the comment, he became the focus of an international letter-writing campaign to drive away all of his advertisers (Klam, 2004). In particular, members of the conservative blogosphere demanded that the politicians who advertised on Daily Kos remove their ads and disassociate themselves from Moulitsas (Barnett, 2005). The response from the Democratic political establishment was immediate disassociation. The Kerry campaign swiftly delinked from Daily Kos
Three of the Democratic candidates advertising on Daily Kos pulled their ads (Platoni, 2004). One of the first was Texas Democrat Martin Frost whose campaign noted its departure from Moulitsas’ site by saying, "There is no place for these disgusting remarks in this nation's discussion on foreign policy" (Barnett, 2005).

Although the political establishment and some of the candidates cut their ties with the blog, the Kossack community remained. Daily Kos’ traffic figures for April of 2004 show no decrease in the wake of Moulitsas' comments (Barnett, 2005). Within weeks, political advertisements returned. Longtime blog reader, Daily Kos member, and long-shot congressional candidate Jeff Seeman, who would become one of the “Koz Dozen,” was the first to advertise after the controversy. Outlining his reasons for advertising on Daily Kos Seeman’s campaign stated, “We refuse to allow our campaign to be bullied by the right wing like they bullied Kos' previous advertisers.”

The Daily Kos community repaid his loyalty by jumpstarting his flagging campaign (Platoni, 2004). By the November 2nd election, Seeman had gained new campaign staff and raised $60,000, half of his campaign money, from the Daily Kos community. Because of the support of candidates like Seeman and the Kossack community, the controversy blew over. Moulitsas would later refer to it as a “blip.”
Consulting

The second controversy involved the undisclosed client roster of Moulitsas’ political consulting firm. In January 2005 Moulitsas posted critical comments about Armstrong Williams, a conservative pundit who admitted to taking money from the Bush administration to publicly support the No Child Left Behind program. His January 10, 2005 post said, “Until names are named, we can assume every conservative pundit is on the White House's payola rolls.” This criticism prompted a backlash against Moulitsas. People responded that Moulitsas was potentially guilty of doing the same thing, as he had not disclosed his consulting firm’s client list. Because members of Daily Kos raised money for Democratic candidates, people speculated whether Moulitsas’ endorsement was purchased.

Brian Reich, writing on the website Personal Democracy Forum suggested that Moulitsas used his blog to push the consulting firm's candidates (Platoni, 2004). Dean staffer Zephyr Teachout wrote, "In this past election, at least a few prominent bloggers were paid as consultants by candidates and groups they regularly blogged about" (Suellentrop, 2005). She specifically pointed to Moulitsas’ consulting role in the Dean campaign as an example. Teachout said that Moulitsas and Armstrong were paid as consultants by the Dean campaign, largely because the campaign wanted them to write positive things about Dean. She clarified that while “they never committed to
supporting Dean for the payment,” “it was very clearly, internally, our goal" (Suellentrop, 2005). Overall, many felt that by consulting and blogging at the same time, Moulitsas and other bloggers were blurring the lines between editorial and advertising, lines that had always been sacred in journalism (Klam, 2004).

Armstrong and Moulitsas have both complained vociferously on their blogs about this criticism, and their arguments have merit (Suellentrop, 2005). They counter that Armstrong quit blogging for the half-year that their political consulting firm was on the Dean payroll, and Moulitsas posted a disclosure about consulting for Dean on Daily Kos’ front page during the same period. Further, he points out that unlike the hidden agendas of pundits like Armstrong, he makes no pretense about being partisan on his blog (Platoni, 2004). In response to criticism about the undisclosed client lists, Moulitsas says he is no longer consulting and therefore has no clients to reveal, although he concedes that could change if someone particularly exciting comes along in 2006 (Platoni, 2004). Finally, none of the campaigns that he supported publicly on Daily Kos reported any payments made to his consulting firm Federal Election Commission (FEC) filings.

**FEC and Blogging**

The role of the blogger has yet to be clearly defined in the larger context of media and politics. Because the potential exists for bloggers to blur the line between
advertising and blogging, the government has recently begun questioning the deregulation of the political blogosphere. In 2004, a United States District Court ruled it illegal that the Internet be excluded from campaign finance laws. In April 2005, the Federal Elections Commission (FEC) published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking regarding political activity on the Internet. The Rulemaking is an attempt to decide the best way to govern bloggers, paid advertising on the Internet, and the blog’s political communications.

There have been very vocal opponents to regulating the political blogosphere. Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) introduced a bill that would exempt Internet communications from this kind of campaign finance regulation. Members of the Daily Kos community, along with both left and right members of the blogosphere are also unsurprisingly opposed to the idea of regulation and have set up an “FEC Project.” The project will be preparing a document to send to the FEC outlining the reasons for opposing the new regulations, and answering the questions posed in the Rulemaking. They have called it “open source lawyering.” Clearly, this is an ongoing issue that will continue to unfold.

These two controversies and the new FEC attention reveal the challenges that Moulitsas and the Kossack community face as the Daily Kos blog and the political
blogosphere continue to evolve. Daily Kos is an illustrative case study of a political blog attempting to carve out a space in the political landscape.

This chapter described Daily Kos, examined some of its unique features and highlighted some events from the 2004 election. The next chapter lays out the methodology that I will use to analyze the activity and content levels on Daily Kos.
Chapter 5. Methodological Approach

In the previous three chapters, I provided the background and context for my study. Chapter Two outlined the development of the “new media,” and the role that the new media has played in shaping both the old media and social interaction. In Chapter Three, I gave an in-depth description of a recent new medium, the blog, and the culture that has evolved around it. Finally, Chapter Four introduced the subject of this case study, Daily Kos, highlighting its defining characteristics and features, along with some noteworthy issues during the 2004 election.

This chapter will outline the methodology that I will use to analyze Daily Kos. The first section presents the lay-out of the study. Specifically, I provide my reasons for choosing Daily Kos as the case study, the research question and hypothesis, and the date collection parameters. Next, I list my variables and describe their conceptual and operational definitions. I then describe my recoding scheme and the statistical methodology I will be using to analyze these variables. The final section highlights some of the limitations of this study. In clearly laying out my methodology, I hope to make this study replicable for future scholars.

Research Question and Hypothesis

As I pointed out in previous chapters, there has been much speculation about whether the political weblog is a fad or a lasting online institution. Because the
political blogosphere is so new, having only emerged around the time of the 2004 elections, scholars wonder whether political blogs will be able to sustain their momentum and popularity after the election-cycle is over. To investigate this issue, my thesis will monitor DailyKos to observe its activity levels and content focus before and after the election. There are two reasons why Daily Kos was chosen as the case study. First, Daily Kos is arguably the most highly trafficked political blog in the blogosphere. Second, unlike some other popular political blogs, Daily Kos allows people to contribute comments to posts on its front page. Not only do comments allow me to monitor how the membership audience is responding to the blog in general, they show how much interest is given to the specific posts. In monitoring Daily Kos, my research question is: will the activity levels and content on DailyKos change after the 2004 election?

*Hypothesis 1*: There will be a statistically significant difference in the activity levels and content on DailyKos before and after the election. Or, the passage of the election will cause a change in activity level on Daily Kos.

*Null Hypothesis 0*: The activity levels and content on the DailyKos will be statistically similar before and after the election. Or, the passage of the election will not cause a change in activity level on Daily Kos.

**Data Collection Parameters**

Activity, for the purposes of this study, is defined as participation by members of the weblog, as well as the content creation by the weblog’s owners and authors.
This definition is different than one which would simply measure how many people visit the blog. I chose this definition of activity, because I wanted to measure activity amongst members, rather than activity to the blog. The activity levels will be analyzed based on number of posts, in conjunction with the number of comments each post receives. Content pertains to the subject that is discussed within the message portion of the post. The author of each post self-selects what “issue area” that the post falls under, and these identifications will be used to analyze content.

To monitor the activity and content on DailyKos, I recorded only the posts to the front page of the weblog. The front page is defined as the webpage that comes up after entering in the Internet address for the Daily Kos blog, www.dailykos.com. The data set will include every post to the front page beginning at 5:01 PM on October 13, 2003 and ending with the last post on March 31, 2005 at 8:47 PM. This date range was chosen as it includes all posts to the current Scoop-powered blog; posts from the Movable Type platform are kept at an alternate Internet address, www.dailykos.net. There were 5,675 posts that occurred during that date range. From each post, the following seven items were recorded: author, day of the week, month, date, year, time, number of comments and content category. The following sections will go into more detail about each of these specific measures.
Variables

There are five primary variables that will be tested in this study: comment, content, author, date, and time. The “post” serves as my unit of analysis. Each post constitutes one case. The dependent variable in my analysis is “date.” Because the “date” variable was broken into four separate categories, “month” and “year” will be used in conjunction with each other to constitute the dependent variable for “date.” The two primary independent variables in this study are “comments,” used to track activity levels, and “content,” which will obviously track the content of each post. The number of posts that fall within a certain “date” is another independent variable. The “author,” “day of the week,” “calendar date,” and time will be introduced as control variables.

Post

A post is a self-contained message that is displayed on the front page of the weblog. Each post is separate and clearly distinct from one another. A post has a title that specifies what the message of the post will contain. The message portion of the post varies in length. The number of posts can be arbitrary, dependant on both the availability of the weblog owner and the select members, and how much they have to say on that particular day. Because of the restrictive nature of posting, this is not the only measure for how much activity is occurring on the site. It does not take into
account how much the members of the website are contributing. It should be used as a measure in conjunction with the comments, which better track member activity.

For this study, each post is recorded as a case. As a case, the post does not have its own code; it is defined by the other variables such as author, date, time, content category, and number of comments. The number of posts will be tracked based on their date identification. There are 5,675 posts that will be studied in this analysis. Each post specified by the blog as falling within a specific date will be recorded as having occurred on that date.

**Comment**

A comment is a reply to a post, made by a member of the weblog. This is the primary independent variable for this study, as it is the measure for activity level. The number of comments shows how much the members of the community are reacting and interacting within each post. The post serves as the basis for discussion. If a person has registered with the site, they can contribute a comment. If not, they are permitted to read the comments, but cannot contribute. The number of comments demonstrates how much conversation is taking place for each post. This is a good marker for activity levels because it shows how much members are participating in conversation with each other within the forum of the weblog. Therefore, tracking comments will be the primary focus of the study.
The number of comments will be tallied no earlier than one calendar date following the posting date, to capture all comments for a given post. The number of comments is specified by the weblog. When a member wants to participate in the discussion, they can click on the “discuss” button at the bottom right of each post. A tally of the number of comments for the post is located next to this bottom. This tally will be recorded as the comment variable; the number of comments are not hand counted. The original coding for comments was to simply record them as the numbers that were posted on the blog.

Content

The content of a post is defined as its subject matter, or the written material contained within the body of the post. This material may be lengthy or short, written solely by the author or quoting an outside text, heavily linked to other sources or containing no links at all. The topics covered by the material are equally as varied. Most of the content on Daily Kos pertains to political issues such as elections or political parties, but there is also content dealing with policy issues, media or miscellaneous topics. To sort through and reliably code for all of this material would be difficult and time consuming.

Fortunately, the Daily Kos blog has already set up a system for identifying the content of each post. There are pre-existing categories that each post is falls under.
The number of categories is not predetermined, but constantly being added upon as new topics surface. For example, following the 2004 elections, the new categories of “2006 Elections” and “2008 Elections” were created. At the time of this study, there were twenty-five categories in existence. The content category is determined by the author of the post. Each post contains a “content” link in the bottom left hand corner that identifies its category. Clicking on the link gives a sample of the most recent front page posts in that content category. This link will be used to record the content for each post. The original content coding assigned all twenty five categories with a number. This number is subject to change as Kos decides to add new categories.

**Author**

The author is the person responsible for writing the title to the post, the content of the post, and assigning it a content category. There are three main author groups who post on the Daily Kos front page. First, of course, is Markos Moulitsas or “kos,” as he is identified in his posts. Ultimately he is the primary post author, as it is his blog. The second group of authors is the guest bloggers or “irregulars.” These are members of the Daily Kos community who have been chosen by Moulitsas to post to the front page, based on the consistent quality of both their diaries and their comments to other’s posts. The final group of authors is made up of members whose diaries have been elevated to the front page, either by Moulitsas or one of the guest bloggers.
These members are not necessarily popular within the community or regular posters. They are most often elevated because their diary said something that someone in one of the other two groups found interesting.

In this study, the author is a control variable that will be used to determine whether who is writing the post has an effect on its activity level and content. The author of each post will be tracked based on identification given by the website. The DailyKos weblog has the author on the second line of each post (preceded by the word “by”). Like the content tag, the author’s name is a link that leads to the most recent posts (or diaries on the front page) and diaries. This variable tracks the author based on their member name, not their real name. On Daily Kos, there is no way of determining anyone’s real names unless they use them as the member names. The “author” variable was originally coded based on number of posts. Anyone who authored more than twenty posts was assigned their own number, and the rest were coded under the number “20.” This resulted in 12 different coded authors.

**Date**

The date is defined as the day that the post was added to the main page of the weblog and made public. The date is important for this study because it is the means of determining whether a post and comment is before or after Election Day. Tracking the date is the way to determine what constitutes one complete set of posts for a day.
The date is tracked based on the date tagging given by the website. On DailyKos the date shows up on the third line of each post—after the heading and the author identification. The date will be broken into four parts for analysis. It will be broken down by month, date, day of the week, and year. This is done for cross tabulation purposes, to determine if different components of the date play a role in activity level or content. The analysis will look at all of the posts in the dates ranging from October 13, 2003 through March 31, 2005. November 2, 2004 is Election Day. Posts that fall on or before November 2, 2004 will be recorded as being before Election Day. Any posts after November 2, 2004 will be recorded as falling after Election Day.

Because the date was broken into four variables, there were four different coding schemes. The first coded was the “days” variable which began with Monday as the number “1,” and ended with Sunday as number “7.” Next, the “month” variable began with January coded as “1” and ended with December coded as “12.” The “calendar date” variable simply recorded the numeric date of the month. Finally, the “year” variable coded the year 2003 as “1,” the year 2004 as “2,” and the year 2005 as “3.”

*Time*

Time is defined as the specific hour and minute that the post was added to the main page of the weblog and made public. The time stamp is extremely important in
the functionality of the weblog, because, as noted previously, it shows which post is most current, and it emphasizes that the blog is constantly updated. This study will track time as a control variable to determine whether it plays a role in the activity level and content of each post.

The time is tracked based on the time stamp given by the website. On DailyKos, the time shows up on the third line of each post - after the heading and the author identification. The time was identified by the International standard, which assigns time based on a twenty-four hour scale (as opposed to AM/PM). The “time” variable coded all posts within an hour as being within that hour, beginning with “0” and ending with “23.” So a post at 11:30 PM would be coded as “23.” This resulted in twenty-four time categories.

**Recoding the Variables**

In order to make the statistical analysis more manageable, I collapsed many of the categories within each variable. The following section will briefly go over the new recoding scheme for each variable. A table of the recoded variables is available in the Appendix.

The “content” variable was the first that I recoded. I merged the twenty-five categories into twelve, based on three factors. The first factor was whether I felt it was necessary to study the category independent from the others. Categories like “Bush
Administration,” “Democrats,” and “Republicans” remained separate as a result.

Second, I looked at how many posts fell under each category; those with a small number of posts were merged with others. There were several categories that pertained to domestic policy issues like health, law, and labor that I collapsed into one entitled “Policy.” The final factor was how similar categories were to each other or a larger topic. There were several categories about congressional races that I was able to collapse into one general “Congressional Election” category.

I recoded the “author” variable into three categories. The recoding scheme put “kos” in his own category, the authors with over ninety posts in a second category (guest bloggers), and the rest (other authors) in the third category. This collapsed recoding was done for more manageable statistical analysis.

Finally, I simply collapsed the “comments,” “time” and “date” variables. The comments were collapsed by percentages. The original number of comments ranged from 0 to 955. The recoded comments divided these into four separate categories based on twenty-five percent intervals. As a result, comments 0 through 68 became “1,” 69 through 119 comments were coded as “2,” comments in the range of 120 to 193 became “3,” and comments 194 through 955 were coded as “4.”

For the time variable, I divided the day into four different categories. The first category is the “night” hours from midnight through 5 AM. The second category is the
“morning” hours from 6 AM to 11 AM. Next, the “afternoon” includes noon to 5PM. Finally, “evening” ranges from 6 PM to 11 PM. The “date” variable collapsed the dates into three categories: “beginning of the month” is the 1st through the 10th, “middle of the month” is the 11th through the 20th, and the “end of the month” is the 21st through the 31st.

**Statistical Methodology**

This study uses statistical methodology to examine the research question and hypothesis. The hypothesis is that there will be a statistically significant difference in the activity levels and content on DailyKos before and after the election. The number of posts and the number of comments per post will be the two independent variables that signify level of activity. The number of posts is controlled by the blog owner and guest bloggers, which makes it an important factor in determining the activity level of these two controlling parties.

The number of comments per post was chosen because it indicates the activity levels of the membership. It shows how much response each post is getting as members are free to comment as much or as little as they want, depending on levels of interest and engagement. The “month” and “year” variables will be used to determine whether a post fell before, on or after the election. During the methodology portion, there are three operational hypotheses.
*H a:* The number of posts will differ based on whether the post is before or after the election.

*Null H a:* The number of posts will be similar before and after the election.

*H b:* The number of comments per post will differ based on whether the post is before or after the election.

*Null H b:* The number of comments per post will be similar before and after the election.

*H c:* The content of the posts will differ based on whether the post is before or after the election.

*Null H c:* The content of the posts will be similar before and after the election.

**Crosstabulation**

The methodology that will be used is Crosstabulation. Crosstabulation or “crosstabs” examines the correlation between two variables. This methodology will help determine the correlation between whether the post is before or after the election and its activity level and content by computing the number of cases that fall into particular categories or levels of each variable in the comparison. The primary variable for each of the three hypotheses will be crosstabulated with month and date, which signify whether the posts fall before or after the election. For the purposes of this study, November 2004 will be included as falling after the election, and it fall on the second day of the month.

Next, using the Chi-Square test of statistical significance, the study will test whether these differences were real or occurring by chance. The Chi-Square test
compares the expected frequencies with the values that have been observed. If the gap between the expected and observed is large, and the chi square is large, the relationship did not occur by chance, and is real. If there are statistically significant differences between the number of cases falling before and after the election, then there will be support for my research hypotheses. If the findings are not statistically significant or there are no differences, then this methodology will have supported the null hypotheses that there is no difference in activity levels and content before and after the election.

Crosstabulation also takes into account the role that control variables play in the relationship of the two primary variables that are being tested. The four control variables, author, day of the week, calendar day, and time will be used to determine whether they play a role in shaping the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

**Limitations to Methodological Approach**

While there are countless limitations to any methodological approach, this section will point out four of the most relevant and apparent for this study. First, the study only investigates one case study of a left-leaning political blog, rather than doing a comparison between a left-leaning and a right-leaning blog. This was done deliberately for several reasons.
One primary reason for only doing one case study is that casual observation of the blogosphere did not yield a popular conservative blog with metrics that would compare to Daily Kos. The top conservative blog, Instapundit, does not allow comments on the front page of the blog, nor does Instapundit label each post with a content category. A comparison between these two most popular blogs would have been difficult. Second, although I did find a conservative blog that was somewhat comparable to Daily Kos called Captains Quarters, it is not nearly as popular or reputable as Daily Kos. Finally, time constraints would not have allowed for the kind of in depth analysis and observation for two blogs that I was able to do for one. Nonetheless, because the other side of the political spectrum was not included in this study, the findings may not be applicable to right-leaning blogs. As the Republicans won majority in Congress as well as the Presidency, and the Democrats lost both, the way their respective blogs to the election reacted could be quite different.

The kinds of variables that I used to track activity levels are another limitation to my methodological approach. There are other ways to track activity, such as looking at Daily Kos’ traffic measurements or how many diaries are created by Kossacks each day. I chose not to look at traffic because I was interested in the level of interaction between members of the blog rather than simply how many were visiting. A future study might combine traffic statistics and the activity measures I
used to get a more comprehensive depiction. I did not track the diaries because of the sheer volume that are produced daily. During the election, there were almost 500 diaries being created daily. Time constraints prohibited me from undertaking the task of recording every diary from the beginning of the blog’s transition to Scoop.

There were also other ways that I could have tracked the content of each post. Although I recorded the title to each post, I was unable to run any sort of content analysis for these titles that may have suggested new topics within the posts. Further, I could have done content analysis on the message portion of each post to get a better understanding of what kind of reoccurring themes were running through them. The content categories could have been cross-tabulated with both the content of the title and the content of the post for a fuller picture of a post’s content.

Although there were these limitations to my methodology, my data set was sufficient for testing my hypotheses and producing findings. The next chapter will describe my findings and offer my analysis. The chapter will also supplement the findings with some anecdotal evidence that lends itself to the analysis.
Chapter 6. Findings and Analysis

The previous chapter explained the methodological approach that was used to collect data for my study. This chapter discusses my statistical findings and offers an analysis of their implications for my hypotheses and research question. In the first section, I present the descriptive statistics for each of the variables. This section is followed by the results of the cross-tabulation with and without each of the controls for the posts and comments. Next, I perform a cross-tabulation for the content variable, although without the control measures, as they did not yield enough cases to be statistically significant.

Finally, using both the statistical findings and anecdotal evidence, I go into an in-depth analysis of the results for the cross-tabulation of content with comments. To analyze these cross-tabulations, I compare the activity level and content for the five months that have data for two consecutive years: November 2003 and 2004, December 2003 and 2004, January 2004 and 2005, February 2004 and 2005, and March 2004 and 2005. Overall, this chapter uses findings and analysis to evaluate my hypothesis and explore my research question.

In general, my findings provided support for my hypothesis that there will be a statistically significant difference in activity level and content on Daily Kos before and after the election. After the election, the findings indicate that there was more
interaction within the Daily Kos community, for both the blog authors as well as commenting members. The findings show that there were more posts and more comments per post. Further, the content of posts changed after the election. The following sections will go into detail about the specific measures that led to this conclusion.

**Descriptives**

This section will discuss the descriptive statistics, along with the frequencies for each variable. Figure 6.1 gives the mode, mean, and median for the variables, with the recoded variables’ statistics in parenthesis.

**FIGURE 6.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Author (recoded)</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Calendar Date (Recoded)</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Time (rec.)</th>
<th>Comments (recoded)</th>
<th>Content (recoded)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2 (3)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9 (3)</td>
<td>83 (3)</td>
<td>21 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.01 (1.59)</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>15.75 (2.01)</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>12.92 (2.73)</td>
<td>148.07 (2.52)</td>
<td>14.16 (4.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16 (2)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13 (3)</td>
<td>121 (3)</td>
<td>15 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Author**

From the descriptive statistics, it is clear that Moulitas or “kos,” is the most prolific author, unsurprising as it is his blog. He is coded as “1,” out of 12 authors. With a mean of 3.01, it is clear that “kos” is the most dominant poster. Moreover, the mode of “1” means that he is the author who posts most frequently and the median of
“1” indicates that his posts constitute at least half of all posts. A look at the frequency table validates these observations. Kos has 3,231 posts, constituting 56.9 percent of the overall percentage. The guest bloggers made up nearly 26.8 percent up the authors with 1522 posts, and the other authors 16.2 percent with 922 posts. These statistics indicate that the front page is more restrictive to the other authors and guest bloggers, with Kos writing the majority of the posts.

**Day**

The descriptives for the day of the week variable indicate that the most activity occurs during the middle of the week. Wednesday, coded as “3,” has the most number of posts and the median indicates that half of the posts occur before Thursday. The mean of 3.80 could either indicate that the days have a somewhat equally distributed number of posts, with a slight lean towards the end of the week, or it could mean that most posts fall in the middle of the week. The frequencies confirm that Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday have a higher number of posts that the other days. Thus, these descriptives indicate higher activity during the workweek, and less during the weekend.

**Month**

The statistics for the month variable are unreliable because I do not have a complete data set with two years of data for all of the months. November, December,
January, February and March all of have two complete months of data, October has one and one half months of data, and April, May, June, July, August, and September only have one month. To get a more accurate picture of each month, I will have to look at the bivariate cross-tabulation of month and year. Interestingly, although October is missing half of a month, it still has the most number of posts. As the month prior to the 2004 election, this finding could signify a peak in October 2004, but more investigation is necessary to make any definitive conclusion.

**Calendar Date**

The statistics show that the 2\textsuperscript{nd} was the most popular calendar date to post on. As the 2\textsuperscript{nd} is Election Day, this is an interesting finding. The mode of “2” stands in contrast to the median of 16 and the mean of 15.75, both of which indicate that activity was fairly evenly distributed throughout the month, with a slight skewing towards the end of the month. However, as October 2003 is missing data from the first 13 days, this skew might be misleading. The second most frequently occurring calendar date was the 28\textsuperscript{th}, and the 12\textsuperscript{th} was second lowest occurring. (The lowest occurring date was the 31\textsuperscript{st}, but this could be attributed to the absence of the 31\textsuperscript{st} date in some months). These descriptives indicate that the higher levels of activity on Election Day were relatively outside the norm. The recoded date indicates that once combined into three equal groups, beginning, middle and end of the month, the calendar date does not show
much difference in number of posts. Overall, it would seem that absent Election Day and including data from the missing portion of October 2003, the dates are fairly evenly distributed.

**Year**

Like the month variable, the variable for year does not yield reliable descriptive statistics. The majority of the posts were collected from 2004, with only two and one half months from 2003 and three months from 2005. The bivariate cross-tabulation will give more insight into the role played by the year variable.

**Time**

The highest number of posts occurred in the 9th hour of the day (9:00 AM - 9:59 AM). The mean (12.92) and median (13) indicate that while the highest volume of posts per hour occurs in the morning, generally there were more posts in the later part of the day. These descriptives are substantiated by the recoded time variable which indicates that the most posts occur between 12 PM and 5 PM. Overall, the descriptives for the time variable indicate that the most activity occurs during the workday, much like the day variable showed the highest activity levels during the workweek.

**Comments**

Initially, the number of comments per post had a large range, from 0 to 955. With a mode of 83, a mean of 148.07, and a median of 121, it is clear that distribution
favors the lower end of the spectrum. This is further evidenced in the recoding scheme, which was done by percentage. The first three recoded categories, constituting seventy-five percent of the posts, were all under 195 comments per post. A sample t-test shows a t value of 98.4, with a two-tailed significance level of (p<.00). Overall, these descriptives indicate that the posts with a large number of comments are outliers, and the majority of posts have fewer than 200 comments.

**Content**

Because the content variable is not interval level data, and there is no rank order or stand-out category, it is not useful to look at median or mean, as they do not give an accurate description. The mode and frequencies give the best picture of the variable. For the coded content variable, the “Open Thread” category was the most frequently occurring with 1,054 posts. This is unsurprising because it is common practice to post at least one “Open Thread” per day for people to submit their general comments. The second most popular category for the coded content variable is “General Election” (2004), with 934 posts. These descriptives indicate the while elections are a central topic to the authors, it is equally important to give members a forum to freely discuss what they wish.
**Summary**

Overall, the descriptives highlight how the categories within each variable are distributed, and which categories are the most popular. The descriptives show that “kos,” is the most prolific author. They illustrate that more activity occurs during the workweek and during the workday. The descriptives also indicate that posts are fairly evenly distributed throughout the month, with the notable exception of Election Day, and the absence of half of October 2003’s data. The posts with a large number of comments are outliers, and the majority of posts have 0 to 200 comments. Finally, while elections are a central topic to the authors, it is equally important to give members an “Open Thread” forum to freely discuss topics of their own choosing.

**Cross-tabulation**

As I mentioned in Chapter 5, cross-tabulation or “crosstabs” examines the correlation between two or more variables. This methodology will help determine the correlation between whether the post is before or after the election and its activity level and content. It computes the number of cases that fall into particular categories or levels of each variable in the comparison. These results will be evaluated by comparing November 2003 and 2004, December 2003 and 2004, January 2004 and 2005, February 2004 and 2005, and March 2004 and 2005. Next, using the Chi-Square test of statistical significance, which compares the expected frequencies with the
values that have been observed, I will determine if the differences are real or if they occurred by chance. If the gap between the expected and observed is large, and the chi square is large, the relationship did not occur by chance, and is real.

The findings from the bivariate cross-tabulation will be explained in three sections, relating to the three operational hypotheses. The first section will describe overall trends resulting from the cross-tabulation of month and year, and investigate whether the results were changed by adding the four control variables: author, day, calendar date, and time. This section examines hypothesis a, that there will be a statistically significant difference in number of posts on Daily Kos before and after the election. In the second section, month, year, and number of comments will be cross-tabulated, and the control variables are again added. Hypothesis b, that there will be a statistically significant difference in number of comments per post, is investigated. Finally, the third section cross-tabulates month, year and content to find support for hypothesis c that there will be a statistically significant difference in content on Daily Kos before and after the election.

Before I go into the comparisons between the two months, I would like to first point out some overall trends relating to the data, as evidenced in Figure 6.2.
This chart shows the number of posts that occurred per month from the start of
the new Scoop blog in October 2003, to the end of March 2005, when I commenced
my data collection. As the first measure, posts indicate how much content was
produced by the authors of the blog. While this is not the only measure for activity, it
is important because it reveals how many forums were created on the front page for
people to comment. Without the constant supply of posts, members of Daily Kos
would not be able to interact on the front page.

There are two major overall findings that are worth pointing out before going
into the more specific analysis. First, there are two major peaks in number of posts.
The first peak occurs in January 2004 where the number of posts increases
substantially from December 2003. This peak is the most number of posts per month
(320 posts) until July 2004 (341 posts). The January peak is to be expected as it is
when most of the states hold their presidential primaries. As the Democratic primaries were of particular importance to the Kossack community, it would have been remiss of the authors if they had not created more posts. That the next increase does not occur until July is also unsurprising. After the primaries were over, and Kerry became the presumptive Democratic candidate, the campaign cycle had a relatively quiet period. This is typical of most campaigns; March through June and oftentimes July are less visible months for candidates.

The second peak, of course, occurs in October 2004, the month prior to the 2004 election. This month has the highest number of posts in one month (570 posts). This peak starts to build in July, the month of the Democratic National Convention, which is the premiere event of the Democratic election cycle. During the convention, John Kerry’s nomination as the Democratic presidential candidate became official. Undoubtedly, a Democratic blog would start to pick up in posts during this month. From that point on, every sequential month shows gains, culminating at the October peak.

Related to these two peaks, there is another noteworthy finding from these data. Without the peaks, it seems that the number of posts is on an upward rise. There is an increase of 141 posts from November 2003 (222 posts), the first month with complete data, to March 2005 (363 posts). Given that the election occurred four months prior to
March 2005, it would seem that the blog not only maintained its level of activity after the election, but increased. While the months following the election do not compare to either October’s peak, or September’s 434 posts, they do not return to the lower number of posts that occurred in the months before July’s Democratic National Convention. Instead, despite the absence of any upcoming races, the months after the election showed consistently high numbers of posts, all of which were higher than the January peak.

Of course, without looking at the number of comments per post, it is difficult to truly assess the activity levels. At the very least, this chart shows support for a slow, sustained increase in content creation by the authors. The following section analyzes the data differently, with specific comparisons between months in two consecutive years.

**Posts**

For this study, the post is the unit of analysis. Therefore, the cross-tabulation of the month and year yielded the number of posts that were created in each month proceeding and following the election. This section will investigate the following hypothesis:

- $H_a$: The number of posts will differ based on whether the post is before or after the election.
- $H_{a0}$: The number of posts will be similar before and after the election.
As I noted above, this study will compare the months of November, December, January, February and March in two consecutive years in order to investigate this hypothesis.

**FIGURE 6.3**

Findings

The results displayed in Figure 6.3 show support for the hypothesis that the number of posts will differ based on whether the post is before or after the election. Not only was there a difference, the comparison showed that every month after the election had an increase from same month the year prior to the election. November had a 113 increase in posts from 2003 to 2004. Likewise, the month of December showed gains of 120 posts between 2003 and 2004. January of 2005 had a smaller increase of 34 from 2004. The month of February showed an increase of 88 posts from 2004 to 2005. Finally, March jumped from 222 posts in 2004 to 363 in 2005, a gain of
141 posts. From these comparisons, it is clear that there was an increase in activity after the election.

These findings are validated by the Pearson Chi Square test, which indicates whether the findings are real or occurring by chance. The Pearson Chi-Square value of 22 corresponds to a significance level of (p<.00). Therefore, the Chi-Square test supports my hypothesis that the difference in number of posts before and after the election is real. The measure of association used to test this hypothesis is tau-c, which is used to measure the strength of the relationship between month and year. Tau-c is -.533, which indicates a somewhat strong, inverse relationship between month and year, with a significance level of (p<.00)

**Controls for Posts**

To determine whether other variables influence the relationship between number of posts and whether they fall before or after, I introduced them as controls. In general, the control variables showed differences before and after the election. However, their differences were not as substantial as those in the original cross-tabulation, mostly because the cell count was reduced for each correlation. While the differences were still maintained, some of the variables’ categories affected whether there was an increase or decrease in number of posts. The control variable findings
were all statistically significant with Pearson Chi-Square values all corresponding to a significance level of \( p<.00 \).

For the author control variable, there were three categories: kos, guest authors, and other authors. This is an important control for this hypothesis, as the authors are responsible for writing the posts. This control supported the hypothesis there were differences before and after the election, but there was no uniformity in increase or decrease amongst authors. Kos had increases in posts for the months of November, December, and February, but decreases in January and March. The guest bloggers had a substantial increase in November, smaller increases in December and March, and decreases in January and February. Finally, the other authors had a small decrease of 2 posts in November and substantial increases in December, January, February, and March. This control variable indicates that when the guest bloggers and Kos had slight drops in the beginning of 2005, the other authors were able to post more.

The control variable for time was broken into four categories: night, morning, afternoon, and evening. While the categories showed differences, they did not all show uniformly increase after the election. November was the only month to show an increase in posts for the night hours. December, January, February and March all decreased. February actually had the most substantial decrease of 66 posts from 2004 to 2005. In the morning hours, all five months followed the overall trend found in the
original cross-tabulation. All months had increases of over 100 posts from one year to
the next. The afternoon hours, however, returned the earlier trend for the night hours.
Every compared month except December showed decreases and December only
increased by 1 post. The final evening category showed minor increases for November,
December, and March, with decreases in January and February. Overall, while time
did show difference, it only followed the increase trend for posts in the morning. None
of the other categories had that kind of conclusive, across-the-board increase or
decrease.

The day control variable is broken into the seven days of the week. All of the
days showed differences in number of posts before and after the election. While again
there was not the consistency of increase that the original cross-tabulation showed,
there were fewer decreases than the previous two controls. Monday, Wednesday,
Thursday and Friday followed the overall trend with increases in all five months.
Tuesday and Sunday had increases in all months with the exception of Sunday’s
January month, which showed a small decrease. Finally, Saturday had increases in all
months except for November, which had a decrease of two posts. Overall, this control
supports the general trend of increase from before the election to after the election.

Finally, the date control variable was broken into beginning, middle and end of
the month. This control also supported the hypothesis that there was a difference in
number of posts before and after the election. With the exception of the middle of the month, which had a decrease in January, this control supported the general trend of increased number of posts after the election.

**Analysis for Posts**

The findings for the post cross-tabulation between month and year indicated support for the operational hypothesis that the number of posts per month would differ before and after the election. With increases in every month, this analysis lends itself to the overall trends noted earlier. The steady, slow-rise in activity meant that a comparison of months between years would have to show an increase, which these findings did. Overall, it would seem that the election helped spark more postings, which sustained themselves after the election.

This boost might be attributed to the increase in other authors posting to the blog. The control variable indicated that while Kos, the blog owner and creator, and the guest bloggers slowed their activity in the beginning months of 2005, the other authors had increases. The other author category is comprised mainly of diaries that were promoted by Kos or the guest bloggers from the Recommended Section to the front page. The other author category also contains the open thread postings. Therefore, even before looking at comments, it is clear that there was an effort made
by Kos and the guest bloggers to be more inclusive of members of the community by elevating worthy commentary to the front page more often than prior to the election.

In the content portion of this analysis, there should be support for an increase of Diary and Open Thread postings. More will be said about the content of these postings, then, later on in the chapter. For now, it is sufficient to point out that there seems to be a move towards decentralizing the blog authorship. This decentralization could be attributed to many factors. First, in the beginning of the Scoop version of the blog, the diaries were a new phenomenon. Members had to get used to creating their own content, and making this content appealing to the general community. By the beginning of 2005, they had been using the diary tools for a year, and most likely mastered the art of creating appropriate content for the front page.

Another factor for the decentralization might be that Kos and other guest bloggers had more to say during the election, and afterwards looked to the diaries for topics that might be of interest. Or, once the election was over, Kos and the guest bloggers started to focus more on other things, and used the diaries to keep the blog’s content fresh. Anecdotally, Moulitsas went on vacation at some point during these early months of 2005. In his absence, there was more room for the guest bloggers and other authors to post. One final factor for decentralization is that the beginning of 2005 saw a lot of independent investigation of issues like Social Security and the
Gannon scandal. With so many political issues going on, members of the Daily Kos community may have been able to become specialists on a particular topic. Their specialty knowledge may have elevated them to the front page by Kos and the guest bloggers.

As for the findings that showed that there were more posts during the workday and workweek, they seem to indicate that blogging is an activity associated with work. For Kos, posting to and maintaining Daily Kos has become his fulltime job. As such, it is clear from the time of his postings that he treats blogging as a workday. The higher number of posts during the workweek and workday might also be attributed to the news cycle. The main news of each day occurs during working hours. By the evening and night, most of the top stories have already been covered on Daily Kos. The evening and night hours, then, lend themselves to more introspective postings about thematic issues. There are less of these postings, but observation shows them to be longer and more in depth than the postings during the day.

A final reason for the heavy posting during the workday and workweek is the membership’s viewing trends. Kos, looking at site statistics, knows that people are checking the blog from their computers at work. Knowing that he has higher traffic during this time might cause him to post more to keep the interest of his audience. However, it could be the opposite; his audience knows that he will be posting more
during this time and visit more as a result. Either way, it seems that authors have established a routine for posting that plays into the expectations of the audience. The next section on comments will lend more insight to the activities of the membership audience.

Comments

While the number of posts tracks how much activity is occurring with the authors, the number of comments per post shows the level to which the community is responding and interacting to these posts. To measure this activity before and after the election, month and date were cross-tabulated with number of comments per post. The comments per post were measured using the recoded comment variable, which grouped them into four categories: 0 through 68, 69 through 119, 120 through 193, and 194 through 955. Each of these categories, as noted before, constitutes roughly 25 percent of the comment categories before recoding. The comment variable was tracked based on the following operational hypothesis.

$H_b$: The number of comments per post will differ based on whether the post is before or after the election.

$H_{b0}$: The number of comments per post will be similar before and after the election.
Like the post variable, the months of November, December, January, February and March were compared across two years to analyze the hypothesis. Figure 6.5 shows the comparison for each comment category.

**FIGURE 6.4**

**1: Comments 0-68**

**2: Comments 69-119**

**3: Comments 120-193**

**4: Comments 194-955**

**Findings**

As the Figure 6.3 clearly illustrates, there is support for the hypothesis that the number of comments per post differs before and after the election. Whether the
difference is an increase or decrease changes with the category. The first category shows decreases for every month. The second category shows small increase before and after the election. Finally, categories three and four show substantial increases in number of comments per post after the election. In short, the categories with higher number of comments per posts increased, while those with lower or the lowest number increased minimally or decreased.

In general, what can be inferred from these findings is that members of the Daily Kos community were contributing more comments per post after the election than before. As the number of posts increased along with the number of comments per post, both indicators of activity level show a difference. Not only do they show difference, both have an increase in quantity after the election. Therefore, these findings provide support for the main hypothesis that there is a difference in activity level before and after the election.

The Pearson Chi-Square test of significance indicates whether these findings are real or occurring by chance. The Chi-Square value for each category corresponds to a significance level of $p<.00$. This statistic allows me to reject the null hypothesis that the difference in number of comments per post occurs by chance. Instead, it supports the hypothesis that the difference in number of comments per post before and after the election is real.
Tau-c, the measure of association used for this non-symmetrical table, differs for each of the categories. All four categories have a statistically significant tau-c indicator. For the first category, tau-c is -.441, indicating moderate, inverse relationship between month and date and the lowest number of comments per post. The second category has a tau-c value of -.561, which indicates somewhat strong, inverse relationship between month and date and the second lowest number of comments per post. For the third category, the tau-c of -.602 indicates a somewhat strong, inverse relationship between month and date and the second highest number of comments per post. Finally, the fourth category has a tau-c of -.543, again indicating a somewhat strong, inverse relationship between the highest number of comments per post. This summary measure shows that posts with a higher number of comments are more likely to fall after the election than before, while posts with lower number of comments are more likely to fall before the election than after.

Controls for Comments

As with the post variable, I introduced four controls to determine whether they influenced the relationship between month and date and the number of comments per post. The controls supported the hypothesis that there is a difference in number of comments per post before and after the election. However, like the posts, whether the
difference was an increase or decrease changed depending on the categories. All of the
categories were statistically significant (p<.00).

Each group of authors saw differences in number of comments per post, but the
trend of more comments per post after the election was not consistent. Kos mirrored
the trend the closest with decreases in the lowest level of comments through all
months. The middle two categories of comments had both increases and decreases
depending on the month. Finally, Kos showed significant increases in the highest level
of comments across all months. Guest bloggers had both increases and decreases
throughout the first three categories, with more increases than decreases in the second
and third. They too had significant increases through all months for the final category.
Finally, the other authors showed both decreases and increases in the first and second
categories. However, unlike Kos and the guest bloggers, they had uniform increases
throughout both the third and fourth categories. This indicates that all of the authors
were able to attract more interest after the election than before, but the other authors
had the most sustained increase in attention.

For the most part, the time categories showed differences before and after the
election. However, there were two instances with the exact same number of number of
cases before and after the election, contrary to the general findings. Time also showed
opposite trends in decrease and increases. Night hours showed both decreases and
increases in the first three categories, but there was more decline than increase. Also, this time bracket had the first instance of no chance, with January showing the same number of posts in 2004 and 2005. This finding is contrary to overall findings that there was a difference. The night hours actually had a uniform decrease in the fourth category, with the highest number of comments per post.

The morning hours had increases in all categories after the election. Afternoon hours showed decreases in the two lowest comment categories and increases in the highest two. Finally, evening hours had decline in the first category, and both increase and decrease in the second category, with the month of March showing no change from one year to the next, the second instance of similarity for this control. Evening hours showed uniform increase in the highest category of comments per post. Overall, the night hours were the category that showed the most opposing results from the main findings for the variable. This could indicate that people changed their commenting habits before and after the election, choosing to post more in the morning and less in the night hours.

The calendar date, broken into beginning, middle and end of the month, also showed differences in number of comments per post before and after the election. The beginning of the month decreased in all months in the first comment category. The second category showed both increase and decrease. The final two highest categories
both had increases in the beginning of the month. The middle of the month also had
decreases in the lowest category. With the exception of December in the second
category, the final three categories showed increases after the election. Finally, the end
of the month had increases and decreases in the first category. The other three
categories showed uniform increases. In general, the calendar date followed the same
trend as the primary cross-tabulation, with some minor differences. After the election,
people were more likely to contribute more comments, particularly in the end of the
month.

For day of the week, there were five instances where there was the same
number of cases before and after the election. All five occurred in either the first or
second comment categories, and in either November or December. This could indicate
that the control variable for day affects the relationship between month and date and
the number of comments. However, because there are 140 comparisons made in this
cross-tabulation, 5 instances do not seem like a large sum. Therefore, although it
produces noteworthy results, this control does not invalidate the findings of the
primary cross-tabulation. Out of all the days, Wednesday comes closest to showing the
trend. It has decreases in the first category, and with the exception of two instances,
increases in the final three categories. The other days show both decreases and
increases in all categories. With the exception of Wednesday, none of the days
demonstrated the exact trend found in the original results.

**Analysis for Comments**

Looking back at the overall trends shown in Figure 6.2, the first months of the
Scoop-powered Daily Kos blog had fewer postings than later in the year and after the
election. The findings for the comment cross-tabulation indicate that not only were
there fewer postings in the beginning, members were less likely to participate in
lengthy discussions over each post. This is indicated by the high number of postings
that fall into the category with the lowest number of comments. Conversely, there
were fewer postings falling within the category with the highest number of postings.
Like the slow and steady build of posts, there was a similar increase in the amount of
conversation towards the end of the data collection, in the months following the
election. Findings showed a tendency after the election to have fewer posts in the low
comment category and more posts in the high comment category.

These could be indications of a more engaged audience, or they could suggest a
growing membership. As noted before, the Scoop platform is different from other blog
software because it allows the members to interact more. In the beginning of the
Scoop blog, it seems that members had not yet fully grasped the way that the tools
allowed them to interact. Slowly, as they became acclimated to the new blog,
commenting, and therefore interaction, started to pick up. As interaction increased and sustained itself, members seemed to have formed online relationships with each other within the community.

The diaries might have helped to facilitate more conversation between members, outside the activities of the front page. Diaries give members the opportunity to develop a reputation and an audience for themselves through their interests and/or writing style. As members establish relationships through diaries, they are more comfortable participating in lengthy discussions with each other on the front page. Having a shared online history of interaction gives more context to member’s thoughts and reactions to each post on the front page. With added context, there is more potential for in-depth discussions.

That the other authors showed a uniform increase in the number of comments per post after the election further indicates that online relationships are forming within the community. Outside the front page, the authors may have had the opportunity to establish themselves to members of the community, creating a reputation and online identity. When their diary is posted to the front page, people are more willing to contribute comments because the connection has already been established with the author. These connections are potentially very meaningful and personal, even more so
than the connection shared by Kos and members of the community; the other authors had a uniform increase while Kos and the guest bloggers did not.

The increased number of comments could also mean that the membership of Daily Kos has risen from the year before the election. Daily Kos, as the most popular political blog, continues to receive coverage in the mainstream press, which means that more people learn about the site and potentially visit to check it out. As people increasingly come to the blog, there are indications that they become members and comment. This could be particularly true during the election, when people were interested in hearing news and analysis of the campaigns. In an interview on C-SPAN, Moulitsas noted that in April 2005 Daily Kos had 50,000 members, although it is unclear how different this number is from the October 2003 membership. With such a large group of people potentially commenting and interacting with each other, it becomes clear why the number of comments has increased, even after the election ended.

Overall, the findings support the operational hypothesis that the number of comments per post will differ before and after the election. Taken in conjunction with the support for the operational hypothesis that the number of posts will differ before and after the election, it would seem that the two components of activity level have been measured. As both found differences, then it can be concluded that there is also
support for the main hypothesis that activity levels will differ before and after the election. The next section looks at the content component of the main hypothesis to determine whether the findings show a difference before and after the election.

**Content**

The content variable tracks the topics that were discussed within each post. For the content variable there are nine categories: Bush Administration, General Election, Congressional Election, Miscellaneous Election, Party, Policy, Miscellaneous General, Diaries and War. I will approach this section a little differently than the prior two on posts and comments. Each content category will be examined separately. This new approach is employed to present the content categories’ findings in a more cohesive way. There are nine content categories and all of the data could become highly confusing. I will not be using author, time, day or the week and calendar date controls, as the cross-tabulation did not yield enough cases in each cell to be produce statistically significant findings.

Instead, I end this section by discussing the results from a cross-tabulation between the content and comment variables. I do this because merely examining the number of posts for each category only indicates the interests of the authors and not the community in general. For a more general perceptive of the Daily Kos community,
their comments must be taken into account. All nine content categories will be investigated using the following hypothesis.

\[ H_c: \] The content of the posts will differ based on whether the post is before or after the election.
\[ H_{c0}: \] The content of the posts will be similar before and after the election.

Again, each content variable will be analyzed by comparing two consecutive years for November, December, January, February and March.

**Bush Administration**

The Bush Administration content category includes posts about President George W. Bush, his White House staff, his Cabinet, and the Executive Branch of government. Overall, 7.5 percent of the content produced related to the Bush Administration. This category deals with the policies and politics of the Administration, rather than any campaigning done by Bush during the election. This is an important distinction because much of the discussion during the election centered on Bush’s campaign. It will be revealing how much conversation also focused on his policies and those of the Executive Branch. It will also be interesting to see how much conversation centers around the Administration, as the Democratic bloggers act as “watchdogs” on the Republican president.
What the findings from the cross-tabulation reveal is that there is a difference in how often the Bush Administration was the topic of a post before and after the election. The authors at Daily Kos seemed to discuss the Administration more after the election than before. The large increases in January and February correspond to Bush’s inauguration and the beginning of his second term as President. However, there is a decrease in March, which would be attributed to the higher number of posts in 2004 around the time of the 9/11 Hearings, where members of the Bush Administration testified before a special commission created to investigate the events leading up to the terrorist attack. It could also be that the Bush Administration topic was not as widely discussed in March 2005 as it was in January and February of that year.
The Pearson Chi-Square test of significance, which indicates whether these findings are real or occurring by chance has a value of 342.77 and a significance level of \( p < .00 \). This statistic allows me to reject the null hypothesis that the difference in how often the Bush Administration was the topic of a post before and after the election occurred by chance. Instead, it supports the hypothesis that the difference before and after the election is real. Tau-c, the measure of association used for this non-symmetrical table, yielded a value of -.591, indicating a somewhat strong, inverse relationship between month and year and the Bush Administration content category.

**General Election**

The general election category contains posts relating to the 2004 general election for president. With 934 posts, this category constitutes 16.5 percent of the content, and is the second most popular topic. The category was comprised of a wide variety of election-related data, from polls to the presidential and vice-presidential debates. As this category relates specifically to the election, it should show substantial decreases once the general election is over. There might be some carry-over into November and perhaps December, as Democrats continued to discuss and debate the results of the election and seek solace for their disappointing loss.
The findings show that there is a difference in how often the general election was the topic of a post depending on whether it fell before or after the election. Unsurprisingly, November 2004 showed the highest number of posts relating to the general election. Not only did the election occur in the beginning of the month, the loss of the Democratic candidate meant that there was a lot of disappointment and anger, which probably led to more posts on the topic. It is also predictable that March 2004 would have a high number of posts on the general election because it falls directly after the primaries, when John Kerry became the presumptive Democratic candidate for president.

The very small number of posts on the General Election in December, January and February before the election might have been caused by the Democratic primaries, which were included in the miscellaneous election category. While there were a
handful of posts looking to the general election, much was probably focused on the Democratic primary candidates, particularly as the Dean campaign actively maintained an online presence. Overall, the very small number of posts in December, January, February and March after the election shows that the topic faded as a popular choice of conversation.

The Pearson Chi-Square test of significance has a value of 486.66 and a significance level of (p<.00). This statistic allows me to reject the null hypothesis that the difference in how often the general election was the topic of a post before and after the election occurred by chance. Instead, it supports the hypothesis that the difference before and after the election is real. The tau-c value of -.105 indicates a somewhat weak, inverse relationship between the month and year and the general election content category.

**Congressional Election**

The congressional election category is comprised of the collapsed House 2004, Senate 2004, and Kos Dozen categories. The category relates specifically to the 2004 election, rather than any future elections. This category was kept separate from the General Election category because the focus of the content in the two categories is potentially very different. While everyone had interest in the General Election category’ content, it is unclear as to how many members were concerned about
congressional races outside of their own district or state. News reports and anecdotal evidence advanced the notion that many Kossacks were actively involved in congressional races across the country. However, it is unclear whether this is statistically supported. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the two were tracked individually and then crosstabulated with the number of comments to determine the degree of interest.

FIGURE 6.7

The findings show a difference in number of posts devoted to the congressional elections before and after the election. While November of 2003 did not show much content on congressional elections, by December the topic had generated more interest. February and March of 2004 showed substantial increases from the two earlier months. However, much like with the general election category, after the election was over there were some initial postings on the congressional election, but they ultimately
receded. By January, there was no mention of the 2004 congressional elections. Overall, I postulate that after the election, the members’ attention became focused on the 2006 and 2008 elections, rather than dwelling on the losses. Later analysis will investigate this further.

The Pearson Chi-Square test of significance has a value of 288.23 and a significance level of (p<.00). This statistic allows me to reject the null hypothesis that the difference in how often the congressional election was the topic of a post before and after the election occurred by chance and supports the hypothesis that the difference is real. Tau-c is -.119, which indicates an inverse, somewhat weak relationship between congressional election content and the month and year.

**Miscellaneous Election**

The miscellaneous election category was created by combing the following categories: Democratic primaries, governor’s races, elections 2005, elections 2006, and elections 2008. These categories contained too few cases to be statistically significant. Moreover, while the general and congressional election categories explicitly pertained to the 2004 election, these election categories were not so easily categorized. Because they could either refer to the past or future elections, they were grouped together. As a result, they potentially show how much content has already begun to surround future races. Posts in January, February and March of 2005 will most likely look forward to
the 2005, 2006, and 2008 elections, particularly as the findings from the previous two categories indicate a drop-off in 2004 election discussion after December. Obviously, most of the Democratic primaries content will pertain to the primaries for the 2004 presidential election, but there has already been talk of the 2008 presidential elections, as evidenced by the creation of the elections 2008 category. Therefore, it is possible that there could be content about future Democratic primaries. Overall, this is a measure to see whether the discussions about campaigns/political races carried through after the election, given that the previous two showed that it did not do so for the 2004 elections.

FIGURE 6.8

![Content Category 4: Miscellaneous Election](image)

The findings show a difference in number of posts relating to the miscellaneous election category before and after the election. Every month, with the exception of March 2005, has a smaller number of comments after the election. This chart shows
two trends. First, from November 2003 through March 2004, there seems to a sort of curve, with a peak in January. This trend seems to correspond to the 2004 Democratic primaries, which also had their peak in January. By February 2004, it was clear that John Kerry was the frontrunner, and by March 2004, he was the presumptive Democratic nominee.

It is interesting that the content matches this primary cycle so closely. The other trend, from November 2004 through March 2005 shows an upward slope, with the exception of December, which is sort of like a small bump. This trend seems to correspond to conversation about future elections. As members of the community start to get over the 2004 electoral loss, they begin to plan strategies for future success. In general, then, there are indications that this category will continue to grow in popularity as the next elections draw closer.

The Pearson Chi-Square value of 698.95 is statistically significant (p<.00). This statistic supports the hypothesis that the difference in how often the miscellaneous election was the topic of a post before and after the election is real and allows me to reject the null hypothesis that the difference before and after the election occurred by chance. The measure of association, tau-c is -.374 indicating an inverse, moderate relationship between the month and year and congressional election content.
The party content category is comprised of the two smaller Democrat and Republican categories. This category is interesting because it is both general and specific. Generally, this topic relates to discussions about the two parties, their ideologies, and their different ways of communicating their message. However, the category can also refer to specific elected officials within the political party. For example, if there is a post on something that Representative Tom Delay (R-TX) did, it would be categorized as content about Republicans, and subsequently fall under the party category.

The exception to this rule is when the post refers to a politician’s stance on a policy issue. In this case, the post might fall under either the issue or if it is a congressperson, the Congress category, both of which have been grouped together under the policy category. As the election content categories are used to write about the specific candidates, I would expect the posts with party content falling before the election to be more general about the two parties. After the election, I could see the party content being a blend of the general and specific. Future study might investigate this further. For now, I expect there to be more party posts after the elections, as members of Daily Kos focus on issues other than the elections.
The findings suggest there is a difference in number of posts with party content before and after the election. Moreover, every month shows a substantial increase from the previous year. Like I pointed out previously, the year prior to the elections might have low numbers because party discussions were most likely contained within the election categories. Kossacks realized their party activism in election-oriented topics. However, once the election was over and the Democrats had failed to win either the presidency or the majority in Congress, the Kossacks’ party activism resulted in discussions of bettering Democratic message to counter the Republicans. Party activism also resulted in members of Daily Kos playing “watchdog” over the Republican Party, and its elected officials.

The increase in party content also corresponds to some major political issues, such as the privatization of Social Security, judicial nominations and the Gannon
scandal, which pitted Democrats against Republicans. Finally, the increase in party content could be attributed to the emergence of Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) as an aggressive minority leader, working to unify the Democratic Senators. Overall, it seems that there was more interest in posting content on party issues and elected officials after the election.

The Pearson Chi-Square test of significance has a value of 517.78 and a significance level of (p<.00). This statistic allows me to reject the null hypothesis that the difference in how often the parties were the topic of a post before and after the election occurred by chance. Instead, it supports the hypothesis that the difference before and after the election is real. Tau-c is -.683, indicating an inverse, somewhat strong relationship between the month and year and the party content category.

Policy

The policy content category is tangential to the party category, as both relate more to politics outside the election-cycle. While either party or policy may come up within discussions of elections, generally they both seem to relate to the elected officials and the legislative issues that they debate. The policy category contains six smaller categories: Congress, Economy, Foreign Policy, Health, Labor, and Law. These categories were grouped together because they all related to legislative/policy issues, with the exception of Congress.
Congress was included in the category because it was most often used as a content category when the post was discussing a piece of legislation up for vote. Because it involves legislation, I included it. Generally, the policy categories referred to ongoing issues like unemployment, health insurance, or judicial nominations. The Social Security debate was both in this category, and the Bush Administration category. These posts most often critiqued the Republicans handling of the issue. Sometimes they condemned Democrats for not taking a strong partisan stand, or conversely, commended them for taking a strong partisan stand. Like the party category, I expect that there will be more posts after the election relating to policy issues.

FIGURE 6.10

The findings show that there is a difference in number of posts with policy content before and after the election. Further, every month increased from the year
before, some more substantially than others. The year before the election had minimal policy discussion, most likely because the blog authors and members were preoccupied with the upcoming election. There were probably less policy posts in November and December of 2004 because Congress was not really acting on any major legislation. For the most part, Congress was actually in recess during that time.

Without a legislative agenda to guide the content, the policy posts from these two months most likely pertained to upcoming policy agenda of the Republicans, changes to Congress as a result of the elections, or other policy issues that might have been in the news or of particular importance to an author. As January marks the beginning of a new legislative year, and in 2005, a new Congress, there was an entirely new legislative agenda to address. As soon as the legislative session began, a host of policy issues surfaced. Overall, the expectation that attention would focus on policy discussions after the election proved accurate.

The value for the Pearson Chi-Square test of significance is 201.49 with a significance level of (p<.00). This statistic allows me to reject the null hypothesis that the difference in how often the parties were the topic of a post before and after the election occurred by chance. Instead, it supports the hypothesis that the difference before and after the election is real. Tau-c has a value of -.683, indicating an inverse,
somewhat strong relationship between the month and year and the party content category.

*Miscellaneous General*

Miscellaneous general category contains those categories that did not generally relate to another larger grouping, but were too small to remain independent. Included in the miscellaneous content category are: Culture, Media and Daily Kos. The culture topic relates to social matters like gay marriage, sports, academic freedom, sexuality, the entertainment industry, and music tastes. The media category is comprised of all of the postings that relate to the mainstream media, its coverage of the news and political issues. Generally, the posts about media are very critical and negative about the traditional press, at times singling out journalists and/or columnists for their statements, analysis or behavior.

Finally, the Daily Kos category relates to community issues specific to the blog, such as changes in guidelines of behavior or the additions of new features or guest bloggers. Because this category concerns topics that do not convey issues of immediate concern, I expect that there will be relatively few posts in the miscellaneous general category before the election. Conversely, after the election, I believe that there will be an increase, as authors have more time to devote to other issues. The only smaller category that might affect this trend might be media, as authors might be
inclined to post about mainstream election coverage before the election, and press coverage of policy issues after the election.

FIGURE 6.11

The findings show that there was a difference in the number of posts falling under the miscellaneous general category before and after the election. Moreover, the findings also supported my expectation of increase after the election, with the exception of November, which decreased. There may have been fewer posts in November because there was still a lot of attention being given to the election and its results. However, as this attention dropped off, other issues gained more recognition.

Media, culture and community became more prominent topics, particularly for December 2004 which had neither the election nor policy issues to discuss. February and March 2005 had a lot of discussion of the Gannon scandal, a topic that pertained both to the mainstream media and cultural issues like gay marriage and sexuality.
Therefore the increase in these two months is unsurprising. Overall, these findings indicate that the authors were more inclined to include discussions pertaining to non-partisan topics once the election ended.

The value for the Pearson Chi-Square test of significance is 459.77 with a significance level of (p<.00). This statistic allows me to reject the null hypothesis that the difference before and after the election occurred by chance. Instead, it supports the hypothesis that the difference in how often the miscellaneous general category was the topic of a post before and after the election is real. Tau-c has a value of -.603, indicating an inverse, somewhat strong relationship between the month and year and the miscellaneous general content category.

**Diaries**

Like the number of comments per post, the diaries content category is a key indicator of the contributions made by members of the Daily Kos community to the front page of the blog. The diaries category also includes the open thread forums, included because they have the same community-oriented focus. Both diaries and the open threads provide opportunities for community members to discuss their own issues, relatively unfettered from the influence of Kos or the guest bloggers. Thus, their presence on the front page is an indicator of the increasingly decentralized structure to Daily Kos that facilities involvement from members. While it is ultimately
Kos and the guest bloggers who have the final decision about elevating the diaries to the front page, most often they choose the highly recommended diaries.

As the community is responsible for determining which diaries are highly recommended, the presence of a particular diary on the front page can be an indication of the interests of the community. Of course, there are numerous highly recommended diaries in any given month and only a portion makes it to the front page. As the community grows and members start to create their own online presence, inspiring trust from Kos and guest bloggers, I believe that the incidence of diaries on the front page will increase. Therefore, the findings should show an increase in diaries on the front page after the election.

FIGURE 6.12

The findings show that with the exception of November, there were differences in number of posts from the diary category. November is excluded because it only
differs by one post from 2003 to 2004. Not only is there a difference, the findings show the kind of increases that I was expecting. December, January, and February all have substantially more posts from the diary category on the front page than the year prior. These results correspond to earlier findings from the cross-tabulation between month and year and the author control variable.

The other author category had similar gains after the election. Most likely, these two are directly related; the other authors were writing the diaries. Of course, the diaries category also includes open threads, which are not so much contributed by the community, but posted for the community by Kos and the guest bloggers. It is a forum for members to discuss what they wish, on the front page of the blog. In general, it seems that the diary content category shows support for the overall trend towards more community involvement, also indicated by the increased amount of other authors posting and the higher number of comments per post.

The Pearson Chi-Square test of significance yields a value of 880.24 with a significance level of (p<.00). This statistic allows me to reject the null hypothesis that the difference before and after the election occurred by chance. Instead, it supports the hypothesis that the difference in how often the diaries category was the topic of a post before and after the election is real. Tau-c has a value of -.550, indicating an inverse,
somewhat strong relationship between the month and year and the diaries content category.

**War**

The final content category, war, pertains to the “war on terror,” or the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars. This is a difficult issue in the community because there was some support, particularly from Kos, for the war in Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks on September 11th. However, Kos and the Daily Kos community have been firmly against the Iraq War since the idea first started circulating in the media. Opposition to the Iraq War was the primary issue for the Dean campaign, and it slowly transited into the primary issue for Democrats. Once the Iraq war was underway, the community remained against it, but at the same time, was very supportive of the American troops fighting.

For Kos, this position sprung from his background in the military. He along with many other members were particularly resentful and angry at the Bush Administration for putting American troops in harms ways for, what he felt, was an unnecessary war. There was similar tension when Congress began to talk of allocating money for the Iraq war was raised in Congress. While most of the Daily Kos members supported more money for the troops, they did not approve of the money allocated for corporate contracts.
There were so many issues that were discussed about the war that it is difficult to summarize them. Generally, most of the posts were written with a critical eye towards the Bush Administration’s handling of Iraq. When reports began to surface about Abu Graib and other military mistreatment of the Iraqi people, there were many posts concerning the role of senior governmental officials in perpetuating torture. There was a lot of talk about the military shortages and the possibility of a draft. Of course, there was also the famous mercenaries comment made by Kos, mentioned in Chapter Four, which generated so much attention for the press, and subsequently more posts to clarify his position on mercenaries. Along those lines, there was a lot of criticism for the way that the media was covering or not covering the Iraq war. Overall, the sustained insurgency and chaos in Iraq meant that long after Bush had declared victory, American soldiers were continuing to die, in large numbers for a seemingly resolved conflict.

Having so much complexity to the issue means that while the content is specific in that it deals almost exclusively with these two conflicts, it is also considered general because it touches on a number of the other categories, from the Bush Administration, to the media, to Congress, and even to the elections. Because the Iraq war was such an ongoing issue, carrying into both the election and policy discussions, I would expect
there to be relatively little change before and after the election. This conjecture is contrary to the main hypothesis that the content will be different following the election.

FIGURE 6.13

To the contrary of my conjecture, my findings actually suggest that there was a difference in the number of posts containing the war category before and after the election. Moreover, like the other categories dealing with more policy-oriented subjects, this category actually had an increase after the election. Without going into much detail about each month’s events in Iraq, it seems that the increases correspond to heavier periods of sustained conflict, and announcements or admittances from the Bush Administration as to the status of the Iraq initiative. November, the month with the most substantial increase was when American troops mounted the offensive against Fallujah, the supposed headquarters of insurgent activity and the site of the mercenaries killings.
Surprisingly, the month with the smallest difference between years, and the lowest number of posts after the election was January, the month of the first Iraqi elections. There is the possibility that these posts were counted as a political issue, and not necessarily associated with war. Therefore, these posts might have been included under the Bush Administration category. Overall, almost immediately after the election ended, the authors’ attention focused on war.

The Pearson Chi-Square test of significance yields a value of 260.37 with a significance level of (p<.00). This statistic supports the hypothesis that the difference in how often the war category was the topic of a post before and after the election is real. It allows me to reject the null hypothesis that the difference before and after the election occurred by chance. Tau-c is -.537, indicating an inverse, somewhat strong relationship between the month and year and the war content category.

**Comments and the Content Categories**

Looking at the number of posts per category only shows how much interest the authors are showing towards the topic. The number of comments that each category receives is equally important in determining the amount of interest that each category received. As the changes before and after the election have already been established, this section looks at a cross-tabulation between content categories and the four comment categories, absent the month and year. I am looking to see which categories
generate the most posts with high numbers of comments, signifying more interest.

Figure 6.14 shows the results.

FIGURE 6.14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
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<td>28%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Election</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress. Election</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. Election</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>32%</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>27%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaries</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diaries as the Most Popular Category

Interestingly, findings show that the diary category is the most popular. That the diaries are so popular is an important result because it indicates the other authors from the Daily Kos community are able to stimulate a lot of conversation. As oftentimes the diaries that move to the front page are those that receive the most attention in the recommended diaries section, this may not be indicative of the level of conversation that all diaries receive. Nonetheless, that the most popular diaries have a higher percentage of comments in the highest category than the posts created primarily by Kos and the guest bloggers shows that a lot of activity is occurring outside the front page. It is more difficult for a diary to stand out amongst the nearly 200 diaries that are
created daily. The recent diaries section alone features twenty diaries at any given time. Even the recommended diaries section has eight diaries for members to select from. As an average day has about ten posts to the main page, it clearly takes more to get noticed amongst diaries.

One explanation for the higher percentage of diaries in the highest comment category is the “hotlist” function of the personal page, described in Chapter Four. When members decide that they consistently like what another member is writing about, they can add them to their “hotlist,” which will save all of the diaries from that author. The member can go back and read them at their leisure. As posts on the front page might have a wide range of categories, the author might find their interests better matched by the authors on their “hotlist,” who may write more about a topic or issue of greater concern to a particular member than the topics on the front page. It is analogous to a newspaper. Most people might read the front page of the newspaper but only read fully the articles that interest the most. While many people may read the front page of Daily Kos, they might actually only converse about topics that they find the most interesting. These findings could indicate that often these interests are better reflected in the diaries than the posts.

Another explanation for the higher percentage of diaries in the highest category is the popularity of and/or relationships with the other authors. It is very likely that
Kos is the most popular figure on the blog, as he is the owner and creator. However, because he is able to post as often as he wants to, and his posts constitute more than half of all posts, community members have plenty of opportunities to interact with him. Conversely, the members are only permitted to post two diaries daily. Therefore, a popular figure in the Daily Kos community will likely attract more attention with one single post, because there are not as many chances to ensure direct conversation with the member otherwise. Members can converse on other posts in the comments section, but there is no certainty that the member of interest or popular author will be posting comments on that particular post. Of course, the most popular authors are often elevated to guest blogger status. Still, the diaries present the prospect of conversation with members of choice, rather than the more general and/or random community-at-large- that might be commenting on the front page posts.

*Cheers and Jeers*

Anecdotally, there is evidence that small communities have developed within these diaries. The best example of a community is a particular stand-out diary known as “Cheer and Jeers,” created by BillinPortlandMaine, mentioned in Chapter Four. This diary has been created every day for at least two years. It is a daily round-up of interesting facts, figures and quotes from the day, pictures of kids and pets, and other whimsical things like cartoons or graphics. Each “Cheers and Jeers” diary references
the diary posted on the same day the year prior, as a marker of what was going on at that time. What is so interesting about this diary is that it consistently receives a very high number of comments, generally over 300 each day. These comments provide insight into the diaries popularity. Many of the comments go through their own run-down of that particular member’s own “Cheers and Jeers,” often including very personal details.

A core group of members seems to comment every day in the “Cheers and Jeers” diary. This is evidenced by the familiarity with which they address each other, the kinds of comments they exchange, and the fact that they will notice and comment when a particular group member has not posted. The familiarity is evidenced by the abbreviated use of member name. For example, one member known as “holyhandgrenade” is often referred to as “hh” by other group members. The comments exchanged by the core group show a shared history and knowledge of personal details. One group member might ask another how their ailing mother is feeling, or bring up an issue that was grounded in a past conversation. In one instance, the aforementioned “holyhandgrenade” admitted to the “Cheers and Jeers” community that he is an alcoholic. Since that comment, other group members seem to have formed a support group for him, checking on his progress and encouraging him. These
kinds of exchanges do not relate in any way to the political agenda of the blog, but
remain an important staple of the community that has developed.

Another interesting thing that I have observed with this group is that when a
member of the core group posts a diary, not only do other core group members
consistently comment on the diary, it makes it to the recommended list with a fairly
high number of comments. As any member can recommend a diary without
commenting, this could indicate that other members are reading the “Cheers and Jeers”
section and becoming familiar with the core group. While they are not necessarily
participating in the exchanges, they are engaged by the personal conversations between
these members. This could indicate the wider audience of members who do not
comment, but read the content of the blog. It will be interesting to see what happens
if/when these members begin to post more comments.

One final note about the diaries category is that is contains the open thread
posts as well. The open thread is interesting because it is an opportunity for members
of the community to comment about random issues that they might not feel necessary
to create a diary for. The open thread has no particular focus, and there is no consistent
group of people that posts there regularly. Instead, it provides insight into what
members are thinking about and looking at on any particular day. Overall, both the
diaries and the open thread are very popular, and it would seem that their community-focus is a primary driving force for their popularity.

**Analysis of Other Content Categories**

Besides the diary category, party, policy, miscellaneous election and war categories also showed a higher number of posts in the higher comment categories than in the lower categories. Obviously, these are topics that have stimulated the most conversation, perhaps because of the deliberative nature of the content. The party category could potentially inspire more in-depth analysis, particularly when trying to come up with a good Democratic strategy or trying to combat the talking points of Republicans. Likewise policy issues could potentially invoke deliberative discussion about the problems or impact of particular legislation. As I alluded to above, the war category has so many issues surrounding it, many of which have a highly emotional impact that could serve to stimulate more conversation. Miscellaneous election’s increase is actually very puzzling. As most of the posts with a high number occurred after the election, it seems contrary that this category with such low numbers of posts after the election shows such increases in comments. Perhaps this means that while the authors did not particularly care about the topic, members of the community did, and commented a lot when they were posted.
Bush Administration and the congressional election categories showed substantial drops in the higher categories, the miscellaneous general category had slight decreases from the low to high comment category, and general election maintained similar percentages throughout the four categories. The Bush Administration may have had fewer comments in the highest category because members might be less inclined to go into in-depth conversations about the topic. It is not a topic that would inspire deliberation on a Democratic, partisan blog as it is assumed that everyone shares a negative view of Bush and his administration, otherwise they would not visit.

The congressional election category would similarly discourage high levels of conversation, as support for the candidates is assumed. The posts with higher comments within the congressional election category may be the result of more in-depth analysis of strategy. The miscellaneous general category, with slight decreases, seems to have attracted disparate levels of attention from the community. Finally, it is unsurprising that the general election, as one of the most popular categories, inspires roughly equal levels of comments across-the-board. There were so many opportunities and topics to discuss concerning the election that the category received the full range of attention from the community. Overall, the community’s interest in the categories
seems to mirror that of the authors, with the exception of the miscellaneous election category.

This chapter described the findings from the case study and offered analysis on its implications for my research question and hypothesis. I found support for my hypothesis that there will be a statistically significant difference for activity levels and content before and after the election. Activity levels increased after the election, both in number of posts and number of comments per post. After the election, content became more focused on policy and party-oriented issues, while categories relating to the 2004 election dropped off.

The next chapter will offer some conclusions that can be drawn from these findings, and list the limitations of the research. It will also place the findings and analysis within the larger context of scholarly work about this topic. Finally, it will offer suggestions for future research.
Chapter 7. Implications of this Study

This chapter posits the findings of my case study within the larger context of scholarly work about new media, reviewed in the second chapter. Specifically, the chapter looks at the findings in terms of the implications for the online community building capacity of Daily Kos. Next this chapter discusses the results in terms of Daily Kos’ democratizing potential and its creation of a public sphere. The chapter will also list the limitations of the research. Finally, it will conclude this study and analysis with suggestions for future research.

Summary of the Findings

For this study, my main hypothesis was that there would be a statistically significant difference in activity level and content on Daily Kos before and after the election. In the first chapter, I speculated that there would be a difference, and that difference would be a decrease in activity level and a change from campaign-focused to policy-oriented content. My findings supported my hypothesis that there would be a statistically significant difference in activity level and content on Daily Kos before and after the election. They also indicated that Daily Kos trended against my expectations for activity levels; it showed that the activity levels were actually increasing after the election. There were more posts and more comments per post in the months following the election than there were in those same months the year prior. These results
suggest that there was more interaction within the Daily Kos community, for both the blog authors as well as commenting members.

Interestingly, both my initial expectation about activity level and my contrary findings were supported by a recent post from Daily Kos creator, Markos Moulitsas. On April 26, 2005, he wrote the following on Daily Kos:

“After the election, I expected traffic to trail off significantly, giving me a year to catch my breath from my pre-election aggressive (and expensive) infrastructure upgrades (i.e. more servers). Well, traffic is skyrocketing for no obvious reason, no major external news events to drive this crazy growth, so it's clear that my vaunted server rack is in need of some serious upgrading.”

While he was looking at traffic statistics as opposed to the number of posts and comments per post that I used as activity markers in this study, it would seem that based on his statement, they are mutually supportive in their overall indication of increased activity to the blog. Clearly, these results were unexpected even to the blog’s owner. In his view, he sees no empirical reason for the increase. However, it is my contention that these increases resulted from the use of interactive technology which enabled users to participate in discussion with the blog’s author and each other, creating an engaged online community. The following section will go into detail about the ways that the findings indicate increased community.
**Online Community**

Much has been said about the democratizing potential of the Internet. As it has evolved, the Internet has increasingly removed the barriers to entry that typify the broadcast media. In particular, the new blogging technologies make it easier for individuals to self-publish, giving users the opportunity to communicate with people outside of their geographic locus. However, as many have aptly pointed out, tools alone do not create engaged communities of online users. In fact, research suggests that the majority of blogs are not interactive, not linked to one another, not updated, and not viewed by anyone outside of the author’s offline social sphere. Even on the more popular blogs, many authors do not add interactive features that would allow the audience to engage in dialogue, instead using the blog as a broadcast medium. Based on this evidence alone, it would seem that the blog fails to achieve the democratizing potential of the Internet medium.

However, the findings of this study suggest that when a blog uses interactive technology that enables users to participate in discussion with the blog’s author and each other, an online community will emerge. The case study for this research focused on Daily Kos as it began to implement the use of interactive technology. As the blog evolved, there were three signs that a community of blog members was developing: decentralization of authorship, increasing number of diaries and open threads, and the
comparatively high level of interaction on diary and open thread posts. The following sections will delve into these three indicators in more detail.

**Decentralization of Authorship**

When Daily Kos began using the interactive Scoop platform, its authorship was very centralized. The blog creator, Markos Moulitsas was responsible for writing the vast majority of the posts. Guest bloggers and other authors created a relatively small number of posts. However, as time passed and both Kos and community members became accustomed to using the interactive features of the blog, findings show that the community members began to contribute more posts. Figure 7.1 shows this trend.

**FIGURE 7.1**

![Number of Posts Per Month October 2003-March 2005](image-url)
Beginning in April 2004, guest bloggers started to add more posts to the front page, significantly more so than the other authors. However, through the election, Kos continued to maintain his status as the primary author of front page posts. In the month immediately following the election, November 2004, Kos had a sharp decline in posts. This decrease enabled the guest bloggers to contribute to the front page, at a higher rate than Kos.

In the following month, December 2004, it was the other authors who had an increase in posts, while the guest bloggers saw a decline. This could be attributed to a sort of “changing of the guard.” As guest bloggers leave, they are replaced with members of the community who have contributed in the past. Therefore, if an “other author” had been elevated to the status of guest blogger in November or December 2004, they would not have enough posts at that point for me to have quantified them as guest blogger in my coding.

The sustained increase of the other authors and decrease of the guest bloggers lends support to the conjecture that new guest bloggers were making an appearance on the blog. In any case, by March 2005, all three groups had roughly the same number of posts. Looking at the number of posts contributed by all three groups from the beginning of the Scoop-powered blog to the end of the data collection, there is an
indication that the blog became more decentralized, allowing for greater contribution on behalf of the community.

Community growth on Daily Kos appears to be facilitated by empowering members to contribute to the maintenance and direction of the blog. The members of Daily Kos recognize that the possibility exists for them to contribute significantly to the blog as content creators rather than mere consumers. There is an incentive, then, to produce thoughtful and engaging commentary that will be noticed by other members and Kos.

**Increasing Number of Diaries and Open Threads**

Intrinsically linked to the decentralization of authorship is the increasing number of diaries and open threads. As I mentioned earlier, the diaries are the member-produced posts that are elevated from the diaries page to the front page by a guest blogger or Kos. Slightly different, an open thread is a post put on the front page by Kos or a guest blogger for members to discuss topics of their own choosing. Both diaries and open threads are opportunities for members of the community to dialogue with each other, relatively absent the authority of Kos or a guest blogger.

These posts are only “relatively absent” authority because it is up to Kos or a guest blogger as to whether they will allow such an opportunity to exist on the front page. While they do not write the content of a diary, they decide which one will be
elevated. Members may suggest that an important diary be posted to the front page, but they do not have the necessary authority to place it there themselves. Similarly, members may want an open thread, but they have no power to create one on the front page, and must appeal to Kos or a guest blogger for one to appear. Still, that open threads and diaries exist at all on the blog, lends itself to the kind of community input suggested by the decentralization of authorship. Not only do they exist, findings show that the number of diaries and open threads increased as time progressed. Figure 7.2 shows these findings.

FIGURE 7.2

In the beginning of the Scoop-powered blog there were very few diaries or open threads. Like blog authorship, this indicates that the majority of the content was beginning written and directed by Kos. There were not many opportunities for members to contribute significantly, or dialogue about topics of their own choosing.
As time passed, the number of diary and open thread posts slowly increased, peaking in October 2004. While post-election activity was initially dramatically decreased, within one month, it was on par with levels reached during the summer. Even though March 2005 shows a drop, the number of posts is still higher than October 2003, and higher than March 2004.

In terms of community, these findings indicate that Daily Kos increasingly allows members to create content on topics of their own choosing. There seems to be more willingness to relax control over what is said on the blog, and entrust members to contribute quality commentary in their own posts. Community develops as members of Daily Kos see themselves directly bound to the blog, through their own contributions and interactions. In this way, Daily Kos is evolving from a broadcast medium to a platform for dialogue.

The ranking system described earlier lends itself to this analysis. Members of Daily Kos can rate others’ commentary, again advancing the notion that the community helps to maintain and determine the direction of the blog. It also helps to ensure that the most unproductive commentary is eliminated from the site. It provides the impetus for members to contribute quality commentary to each other’s posts. This means that members are participating in self-policed dialogue, absent a centralized authority. The combination of unfettered content creation and decentralized authority
makes Daily Kos a space for citizens to communicate with each other in an unmediated, personal context.

**Comparatively High Number of Comments**

Interaction is the third key indicator that Daily Kos is developing into a community. I have gone into great detail about this in Chapter Six. What I found was that the diary/open thread category had the highest number of posts in the two highest comment categories. As I pointed out, consistently high numbers of comments for the diary and open thread posts suggests that the community members were engaged in high levels of discussion with each other on posts created outside the authority of Kos or the guest bloggers. This indicates that it is not only Kos’ content creation and unique voice that keeps their interest; it is the information and perspective offered by other members of Daily Kos that keep community members attached to the blog. The high number of comments also suggests that the community responds positively when they are presented with the opportunity to converse about community-selected topics.

The anecdotal evidence of the emerging personalization of diaries, typified by “Cheers and Jeers,” but spilling over into a lot of other diaries lends further insight into the high level of comments contributed to the diaries and open threads. Members of the Daily Kos community have been able to establish their own personality and reputation within the community, creating online relationships not bound to geography.
but by interaction and dialogue. As I suggested in Chapter Six, these relationships give members shared history that allows for more in depth discussion about the political and cultural issues that are often the focus of the blog. The high number of comments for diaries and open threads show that the Daily Kos community is an important source of context for understanding these complex issues, as members participate in highly engaged information-exchange.

**Democratizing Potential of Daily Kos**

Based on the findings concerning community, the increase in activity level after the election, and the change in content; there are indications that Daily Kos has realized the democratizing potential of the new media “to educate, facilitate public discourse, and enhance citizen participation” (Davis & Owen, 7). Creating and enhancing the interactive element seems to be an important way to enable participatory discourse and build a community. On Daily Kos, information flows from many different sources, rather than merely one central authority. The members’ diary posts, archived on the blog, provide a rich informational narrative that members can reference and build upon. By allowing members to create content for each other to digest, there are boundless opportunities for information-exchange and conversation.

The more knowledgeable that the members on Daily Kos become, the more they can contribute to deliberative and thoughtful discussions. That the number of
comments increased after the election and that diaries and open threads have the highest number of comments indicate Daily Kos has increasingly become a forum for higher levels of engagement. Without a content analysis, it is difficult to discern the quality of the content or deem such discussions “deliberative.” However, as I alluded to earlier, the ratings system ensures that the content quality remains high in the estimation of the community.

Because democratic action is intrinsically linked to an informed citizenry, this information exchange on Daily Kos can be seen as facilitating democracy. The sheer amount of content produced on Daily Kos gives visitors and members a wide array of information on a host of topics. As a member pointed out on Daily Kos, “every single person who writes a diary, posts a comment, or lurks to learn how they can help too, contributes an invaluable service to the promotion of democracy. They make us stand up for what's right by exposing us to what is so very unacceptable in a rational society” (April 22, 2005). As members focus attention on an issue missed in mainstream coverage or lend their insight into an issue that is covered they are adding to the collective pool of community knowledge.

In addition to facilitating information-exchange, the Daily Kos blog also enhances democracy through its open invitation to political actors to participate in unmediated dialogue with the community. As mentioned in Chapter Two, for
democracy to truly flourish, it “requires leaders and the populace to discuss ideas and policies affecting the society” (Hill & Hughes, 2). On Daily Kos, any politician can create a member account and write a diary. That politicians have increasingly taken this opportunity and participated in discussions with members of the community suggests that they equally value the power of democratic exchange between public and policymaker. A member of Daily Kos noted that Daily Kos has received “direct responses from [S]enators and [Representatives] who know that they ignore this power at their peril” (catnip, April 22, 2005).

The interactivity of the Daily Kos blog helps politicians focus citizen’s attention on legislative issues that are often lost in the mainstream media’s scandal-oriented coverage. More importantly, it allows the citizenry to engage the politicians about the legislation. Members of the community can question policy choices, ask for clarification, and hold politicians accountable for their actions. While at this early stage, there are very few politicians on Daily Kos; their number is increasing, particularly since the election has ended. Further, as Daily Kos continues to play a role in campaigns, winning candidates will feel responsible to the community that helped them attain public office.

Of course, the blog has yet to see a politician from the opposing, Republican Party come on the site. There are no indications that any Republican ever will, being
as the political environment is so divisive. The increasingly ideological political environment that lends itself to creating such popular, partisan media outlets also restrains their ability to engage a broad, cross-section of the American public. Therefore, while the democratizing potential is realized on the Daily Kos by facilitating information-exchange and dialogue between political actors and the public, it is limited by the same partisan ideology that attracts people to the blog in the first place.

**Daily Kos as a Public Sphere**

In Chapter Three, I came to the conclusion that the blogosphere, in this early phase, does not embody the Habermasian public sphere. However, looking at Daily Kos specifically, there is evidence to suggest that it may constitute a smaller manifestation of public sphere. To determine whether there is support for this idea, I evaluate Daily Kos based on Baoill’s criteria for meeting Habermas’ model. He says that the forum must have “inclusivity of access, a disregard for external rank, and the potential for rational debate of any topic until consensus is achieved” to be considered a public sphere (2004). On all three counts, the Daily Community matches these criteria.

Daily Kos has inclusivity of access. Anyone is permitted to create a member account, under a name that they choose. No one has to pay to have access to the blog
or to a membership account. Granted, Republicans are not inclined to join the blog membership ranks. Should they choose to do so, it is likely that most of their partisan remarks would be community-rated so low that eventually they would be kicked off the blog. Still, Republicans are not restricted from accessing the content of Daily Kos. It is not necessary to be a member to read to content, only to participate in the conversation. Plus, the blog purports that anyone who contributes remarks that are of high quality, even if they do not agree with the majority of the blog membership, will be permitted to remain on the blog. Thus, the only standard for retaining access to Daily Kos is that one contributes commentary that is of high quality.

There is a disregard for external rank on Daily Kos. With the accounts that are created, it is difficult to determine any personal characteristics about unless they should choose to disclose them. The guest bloggers on Daily Kos did not establish their offline credentials to post on the front page, and have instead allowed the quality of their contributions speak for itself. Even Kos did not initially have offline standing in the political sphere, a fact that many journalists have been quick to point out. Before establishing the blog, he did not have a lot of campaign experience. His credibility on the blog was the direct result of both his role as owner, and the development of his unique online voice through his content creation.
There are only two discernable ways that external rank may play a role on the blog. First, when a politician or reputable political actor sets up an account under their name, external rank does lend them some authority. For example, if a Senator or Representative posts to Daily Kos, it is often elevated very quickly in the Recommended Diaries section. However, this has less to do with privileging their contributions simply based on their rank and more to do with the blog’s mission to enact social change. Exchanges with people who are able to truly affect legislative change are critical to this mission.

Another way that external rank may play a role has to do with the development of a popular group of members within the Daily Kos community. While this rank may not be external, it does create an advantage to those who have become popular fixtures within the community. Still, that their popularity springs from their content contributions makes this popularity a manifestation of dialogue rather than any kind of external, offline ranking. Given that the two ways external rank play a role do not obfuscate the overall disregard for offline identity and rank on Daily Kos, the blog can still be seen as meeting this criterion.

Finally, Daily Kos allows for rational debate of any topic until consensus is achieved. Again, the absence of a Republican perspective does make the debate lopsided. Particularly around election time, I noted earlier that the potential for an
echo chamber to develop exists on Daily Kos. However, with 50,000 community members reading and participating in the dialogue on the blog, there remains a wide variety of perspectives that make debate a regular staple of the site. Topics ranging from religion to health care are met with engaged dialogue and a multiplicity of perspective. While the perspectives may often be degrees of agreement, there is still a great deal of debate that revolves around these degrees of difference and the extent to which they affect the outcome of a decision.

In fact, it is debate and dialogue that drives the blog. Members contribute diaries not only to broadcast their perspective but to receive feedback from the community. Consensus emerges from protracted conversation on a topic, particularly when the issue is spotlighted on the front page of the blog. This is not to say that consensus is always achieved; indeed, the difficulty of having such a large, varied community is that consensus can be allusive. Still, that the members are asked to rank comments based a scale where a “1” means “unproductive;” shows how much Daily Kos privileges rational, productive debate.

Looking at all three criteria, it would seem that to a large extent Daily Kos has come to engender the public sphere. Further support for this contention comes from revisiting the depiction of public sphere in Chapter Two. In that chapter, I pointed out that when people interact within the Habermasian public sphere, they “behave as a
public body when conferring in an unrestricted fashion— that is with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions about matters of general interest” (50). Members of the Daily Kos community enjoy this kind of freedom to express and publish their opinion through both the diaries and their comments. They are able to do so absent any governmental censorship or restriction.

On Daily Kos, members can use profanity, contribute sensitive or sexual images, and criticize the government and the party in power. The only censorship on the blog comes from the community-standards, which do not permit intolerant or hateful speech, or personal attacks on other members of the community. Further, the only restrictions for content creation are that members contribute only two diaries, that they be a certain length, that they not fully cite copyrighted material and that they not overlap the diaries of other members. These restrictions are operational standards rather than censorship.

Further, the political actors that are members of the blog do not have any authority to dictate the content of Daily Kos. This lack of control is what led the Kerry campaign and others to de-link from Daily Kos after his mercenaries comment. They realized that they could not dictate the conversation on the blog, and did not want to be associated with anything negative that might result from the unfettered dialogue. This
de-linking did not deter Kos from keeping his blog a space for open debate. Kos has made a point of saying that members should be able to criticize the government and either party freely, but should expect to be debated on their criticism.

Habermas pointed out that it is “only when the exercise of political control is effectively subordinated to the democratic demand that information [is] accessible to the public” that the public sphere wins an “institutionalized influence over the government” (50). Because content creation is unrestricted on Daily Kos, the blog has been able to play an influential role in the political sphere. The amount of information that is available and accessed by Daily Kos members allows them to remain vigilant in their governmental criticism and their attempts to enact social change.

Not only are they interacting within the Habermasian public sphere, their information-exchange means that their dialogue typifies Yankelovich’s conceptualization of “public judgment.” Through their participatory discussion, members are able to reach a state of highly developed public opinion that exists only when people have engaged an issue, considered it from all sides, understood the choices it leads to, and accepted the full consequences of the choices they make (Yankelovich, 1992, 6). Daily Kos’ interactive platform gives members an opportunity to do their own investigation into an issue and present their findings to the community for feedback. Other members may build upon this evidence, or question its validity.
Having this kind of decentralized forum allows members of Daily Kos to experience a multiplicity of perspective that generates a fuller depiction of a topic and lends itself to the critical analysis necessary for public judgment. Such a process is virtually impossible with a top-down structure. With a centralized, broadcast medium, it is difficult for citizens to know whether that they are receiving the most complete explanation of a topic. As a result, they slowly disengage from the information that they receive.

On Daily Kos, members are encouraged to critically discuss the content they disseminate and the most popular diaries are those where members lend their own perspective and analysis to the news stories they are relaying. Through its interactive technology, Daily Kos has been able to carve out a public sphere for members to engage in public judgment by allowing a community of people to participate in conversations with each other about topics that interest them.

**Limitations**

While this study gives insight on the impact of enabling the interactive element on a Democratic weblog, it does not necessarily apply to a Republican, conservative weblog. As I mentioned previously, the decentralized, disintermediated realm of online interaction is most suited to the Democratic Party, as studies by Hill & Hughes (1998) and Pew (2004) demonstrated. The Republican Party relies more on a tightly
controlled, top-down messaging strategy that is more appropriate for broadcast media than for the grassroots style of participatory blogging. Indeed, observation shows that the most popular conservative blogs like Instapundit do not have an interactive element, and instead function like a newspaper column. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine whether the results are study specific, or relatable to other Democratic and/or interactive blogs. Therefore, these findings cannot be universally applied without comparison to other political blogs.

Moreover, many conclusions made about community, activity and content are limited by the scope and methodology of the study, mentioned in Chapter Five. Other mitigating factors missed by the data collection parameters may have played a role in shaping my results. Findings suggest that there is a growing community on Daily Kos, that activity levels increased and that content creation is increasingly decentralized. But without looking at other features of the blog, analyzing traffic statistics or doing a content analysis, there is no way to determine to what extent these are occurring.

**Future Study**

Given these limitations, there are many areas for scholars to build upon this study in the future. This study indicates that interactivity can build and sustain a political blog’s community, even after the election has passed. However, because these findings are based on a specific case study, there needs to be more investigation
to place Daily Kos within a comparative context. To create this context, a future study could take a random sample of political blogs and measure how they weigh against Daily Kos in terms of their ability to sustain momentum and popularity after the election. In particular, are there differences in activity levels for conservative blogs, given that their party won the election? Scholars could look at how many political blogs in the sample allow comments. Of those that do, how many go a step further and allow people to create content on the site, beyond comments?

There must be more comparison between left and right leaning blogs. The random sample could measure whether Democratic blogs are more likely to have an interactive element than Republican blogs, as suggested by past research. Do Republican blogs employ the same top-down structure that embodies the party’s messaging strategy? More specifically, an in-depth comparison between Daily Kos and a conservative weblog is needed. How has a top conservative author set up his or her blog? It would be interesting to see if there are any differences in the way that conservatives and liberals interact and communicate online, given the new balance of political power. Further, in-depth comparison is important for determining whether Daily Kos is similar or different to other Democratic blogs. Is it a stand-out anomaly or a good example of a Democratic blog?
It is also important that future study employ a more qualitative, content analysis while looking at political blogs. Part of the significance of the new blog medium is that people can now dialogue about issues of their own choosing, in an unmediated environment. What are these people saying about politics, given this opportunity? Assuming the interactive feature is enabled, what kind of feedback are they receiving from people reading their blogs? Is it a small number of people contributing a high number of comments, or a large amount of people contributing a smaller number of comments?

Looking at Daily Kos in particular, there are a number of areas for future exploration. How much exchange occurs about the topic of a post, and how much goes in another topic direction? What kinds of comments do people consider valuable, and rank highly? Conversely, what is considered unproductive? What makes a diary popular? Is there a correlation between the diary’s author and its popularity? Is there a difference between diaries that are highly recommended but do not receive a lot of comments and those that are highly recommended and do receive a high volume of comments? How do the blog’s traffic statistics measure against the number of posts written or the number of comments contributed? How do members respond to politicians? Are they more critical or complimentary?
In short, future study must determine whether the findings of this study are applicable to other political blogs, and if so, which ones. Further, future research needs to build upon the analysis offered through this study, using more measures for activity and content.

**Conclusion**

The political blog is a medium that is constantly evolving and becoming increasingly important for the political process. The rapid rate of technological change means that it is unlikely that the blog medium will sustain itself in the format described by this study. However, the community that has emerged on the blog and the high level of dialogue between its members suggest that citizens are trending towards more political involvement, after decades of disengagement. Ultimately, it is through community interaction that people develop a stake in the direction of the political process.

Blogs like Daily Kos help to close the gap between individuals’ personal and collective-level judgments as members engage in personal dialogue about collective action. This results in an overall increase in shared and individual knowledge of political issues, bypassing the effects of impersonal influence from the mass media. Their engagement stems from the important social bonds that members develop with
each other over time on the blog. The personal context created by interaction on Daily Kos allows members to converse about important issues in a disintermediated space.

Overall, the community growth coupled with the increases after the election suggest that it is not the campaign content that sustains the momentum and popularity on Daily Kos, it is this ability to facilitate democratic discussion. Within the Daily Kos forum, citizens are able to directly connect with each other, leading to social change as members discuss and implement ways to impact the political sphere. The sustained activity levels and content differences indicate that social change for Daily Kos community members is not limited to campaigning.

Once the campaigns ended, members of community were able to turn their attention to policy issues, maintaining their engagement with each other and the blog. Their impact on the Jeff Gannon scandal and the Social Security debate are measures of the community’s willingness and ability to enact social change. The results of this research are significant because they indicate that the capacity to act on the political process rather than merely observe is increased manifold by membership to interactive blogs like Daily Kos. In general, this study suggests that by creating a space for dialogue, Daily Kos has emerged as a place for citizens to regain a sense of civic renewal, in a mass-mediated age of declining public engagement.
References


Barnett, D. (2005, February 2). The Daily Kos is the most popular and important force in the blogosphere; it's a fact with which Democrats are just now coming to grips. Weekly Standard. Retrieved March 9, 2005, from http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/005/207exwra.asp


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### Appendix

**Coding: Content**

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<th>Original Content Categories</th>
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<td>General Election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 2004</td>
<td>Congressional Elections</td>
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<td>Miscellaneous Election</td>
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<td>Saturday</td>
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**Coding: Time**

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**Coding: Calendar Date**

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Endnotes

1 See http://mediamatters.org/items/200501260015 for more detail, accessed April 2005
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