Political Blog Readership:
Predictors & Predispositions

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Oxford Internet Institute Summer Doctoral Programme
July 26, 2007

What is a blog?

- Based on the post as a unit, stored in a database on the server; web-based software for easy shuffling of web display

- Displayed on generally uniform templates in reverse chronological order and in other ordering schemes (by month, by category, individually, etc.)

- More precise genre (as opposed to medium) distinctions should be made through modifying terminology – e.g., "sports blogs," "candidate blogs"

- "Blog" is more like "magazine" than "newspaper"

Why study political blog readers?

- The idealistic reason:

  - Blogs are unique in the extent to which the audience community helps to form and utilize content, and the extent to which said community really self-actualizes

- The pragmatic reason:

 - There is next to no extant research on this topic!

Two research tracks

- Political blog readership as a dependent variable (experimental)

  - What are blog readers' predispositions? What, if anything, does blog readership stand in for?

- Political blog readership as an independent variable (survey)

  - What predicts blog readership? What attitudes, behaviors and experiences are implicated?

Experimental research

- Impact of frames on learning about stem cell science

  - Participants view framed "expert" quote, describing stem cell issue as one borne out of political strategy or values; they then view a compilation of CNN coverage about stem cell science

  - Stimuli are preceded and followed by knowledge quiz

  - Blog readers in value condition show less learning than those in strategy condition; no difference for non-readers

Experimental research

Figure 2
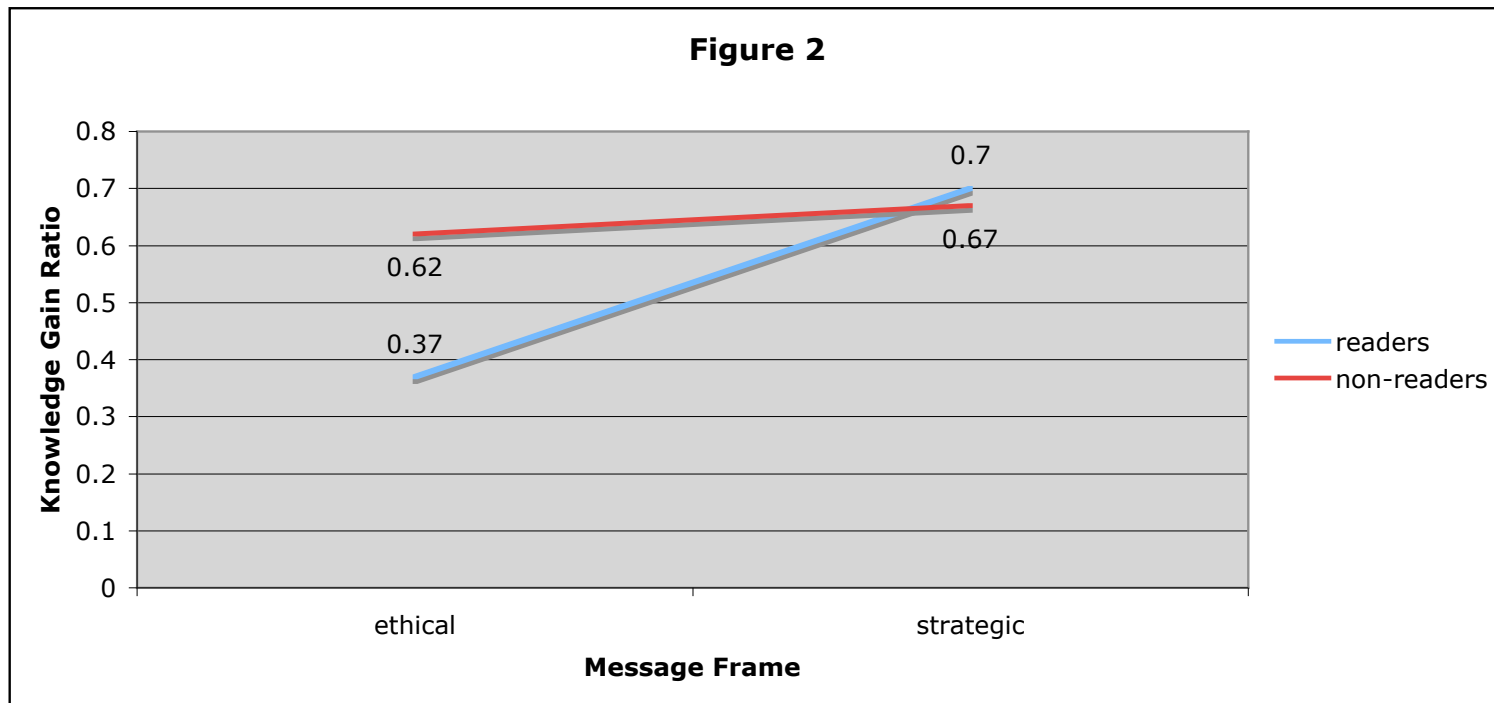
Experimental research

- Impact of frames on attitude constraint in immigration opinion

  - Participants read framed news analysis, describing immigration issue as about either strategy or values, as well as an op-ed either supporting or opposing new restrictions on immigration; they then view a compilation of CNN coverage of "The Day Without Immigrants" and a segment on immigration policy

  - After stimuli, they are asked their opinion on several sub-dimensions of the issue, e.g. English as national language

  - Less constrained opinions in blog readers who saw the strategy frame

Survey research

- Survey data from 40 bloggers and 3,909 of their readers; blogger data used as contextual variables in reader data

- Relationship between bloggers and readers re: political participation online and offline

  - Feelings of community drive online participation, hinder offline participation

  - Bloggers' involvement in participatory activities can drive readers online participation

Survey research

- Relationship between bloggers' motivations and readers' interest in politics

  - Blogger external motivations (e.g., to critique media) positively relate to political interest in readers

  - Blogger internal motivations (e.g., to organize one's thoughts) negatively relate to political interest in readers

  - First pass – next wave of study will be more targeted to these kinds of relationships

Moving forward

- Extending survey work into multi-blog panel study

- Continued exploration of the role of blog readership as DV

- Monitoring changes in blog consumption

  - Are current readers coming and going, changing habits?

  - What is the arc of new readership?