

Need for Orientation and Journalists' Use of Political Blogs in Covering the 2008 Presidential Campaign

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ABSTRACT: This study examined journalists' need for orientation through a survey of print reporters ($N = 80$) who covered the 2008 presidential campaign. Reporters' levels of journalism experience and whether they were based in Washington, D.C., were significant predictors of their use of political blogs as an information subsidy, confirming that need for orientation, consisting of the lower-order concepts of uncertainty and relevance, can be applied to intermedia agenda setting. A separate conceptualization of reporters' need for orientation toward issues, frames, and evaluations found less support.



Need for orientation (NFO)

As consisting of relevance and uncertainty: NFO has been said to consist of the lower-order concepts of relevance and uncertainty (McCombs & Weaver, 1973; Weaver, 1980). In studies of public-opinion agenda setting, individuals with high NFO are more susceptible to agenda-setting effects.

As a three-dimensional construct: Matthes (2005, 2008) identified three dimensions of NFO: toward issues, toward frames, and toward evaluations.

Extending the concept: Can NFO be applied to intermedia agenda setting? Does journalists' NFO predict their use of blogs as an information subsidy?

Hypotheses

H1: Campaign reporters with low levels of journalism experience (and thus, high uncertainty) are more likely than campaign reporters with high levels of journalism experience to use political blogs as an information subsidy. **Supported.**

H2: Campaign reporters based in Washington, D.C., (high relevance) are more likely than campaign reporters based outside Washington, D.C., to use political blogs as an information subsidy. **Supported.**

H3: NFO toward frames and NFO toward evaluations are stronger predictors of campaign reporters' use of political blogs as an information subsidy than is NFO toward issues. **Not supported.**

Predicting reporters' use of political blogs as an info. subsidy ...

... through need for orientation as relevance and uncertainty

	Model 1	Model 2
	β	β
Gender	.01	.05
Education	.06	.07
Employer (0=Wire, 1=Paper)	.06	.16
Maintain Work Blog (1=Yes)	.30*	.25*
Journalism Experience		-.28*
Location (1=Wash., D.C.)		.25*
Cum. R^2	.10	.21*
R^2 change	.10	.11*

† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$

... through need for orientation toward issues and frames

	Model 1	Model 2
	β	β
Gender	-.03	-.07
Education	.06	.06
Employer (0=Wire, 1=Paper)	.13	.18
Maintain Work Blog (1=Yes)	.25*	.22†
NFO Toward Issues		.29*
NFO Toward Frames		-.14
Cum. R^2	.09	.14†
R^2 change	.09	.05

† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$