

## **Web-Mediated Intertextuality: An Actor-Network Perspective**

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### **Introduction**

In web-mediated environment, hypertextuality has become one of the active mechanisms which link texts together. It encourages non-linear readings and allows alternative choices to the reader (Landow 2; Bolter 34). It also blurs the boundaries separating writer/reader, fosters a collaborative authorship and enables interactivity rarely visible in printed media. Once enacted, hyperlinks create "collaborative and socially mediated" platforms where the interconnections between texts with multiple entry and exit points have become more of a reality (Baehr and Lang 39).

This increased mobility and openness between digital texts allow online users to play one text off against another. However, the meaning we construct through these intertextual practices and the ways we construct them might partially depend on the mediation of the web and the functionalities it affords. Once these functionalities are enacted and recognized as having an active role, there is a possibility to understand the way web-mediated intertextuality works and the effects it may generate. If we are to investigate intertextuality in the context of mediated communication, there is enormous value in paying attention to how it can be seen to be performed in one of the most contemporary online platforms and practices-the weblog.

Multiple challenges may arise, however, when we focus on the enactment of the weblog functionalities and their contribution to the construction of an intertextual platform. One theoretical approach to material analysis is offered by Actor-Network Theory (ANT). However, the literature on intertextuality offers little uptake of ANT concepts. This is unfortunate, given ANT's capacity to trace complex materializing processes. When they blog, bloggers translate, adapt and transform dispersed textual practices into a new spatiotemporal framework. Sometimes, these texts are transformed, partly or entirely, explicitly or insidiously, into another and in this waltz of intertexts, there is movement.

To follow this movement, the present paper draws upon the spirit of actor network theory (henceforth, ANT) and empirically traces instances of intertextuality in a corpus of 495 blog entries written by 39 American A-list bloggers during the 2016 American presidential election. The findings of such an analysis revealed that web-mediated intertextuality was an effect of an association between human and non-human entities. Such association highlights not only an enactment of a set of technological functionalities but also an interactivity between dispersed local interactions, texts and agents. To understand the dynamics of mediated intertextuality, this article, in what follows, situates the concept into its theoretical research tradition, overviews the methodology opted for and reports the findings of an intertextual analysis through the lens of ANT.

By hanging flesh on the theoretical bones of ANT, this article contributes to the analysis of digital intertextuality, and introduces a so far unexplored field, web-mediated intertextuality, into the arena of web-mediated discourse analysis. Following the actor-network that generates such a practice cannot be possible via the contextualization of the intertextual practice since sticking to the framing power of the contextual may hide the dynamics of intertextual practices. Instead, the present article identifies the traces of A-list bloggers, follows their transported intertextual practices, identifies the mediators that make such transportation possible, and draw conclusions about the implications of these transformations.

### **Conceptual background**

The main focus of this article is the so called "A-list political blogs". They are popular blogs which mainly cover politically-oriented topics. According to Davis they are widely read "online journals that discuss politics" (Davis 3). They could be published by single bloggers, communities or organizations. Their impact on political communication has been revealed in the flow of political information and the promotion and mobilizing of political action (Vaccari, 12). Most often they receive high number of hits and incoming links with a high number of readers.

Understanding an A-list blog necessitates dissecting its major elements. It is usually composed of a couple of different page types. Doctorow et al. talk about three major types of pages as shown below:



Figure 1. A screenshot of blog pages

As shown above, there is an index page where new entries with the newest content are displayed, an archive page where posts are automatically stored for the index page and other additional pages which contain information about the weblog's author, photo galleries and articles written by the author. Of particular interest to this article is the blog entry (henceforth, BE). It includes the frequently updated content that readers read and respond to (Herring et al.). It is a thematic unit that is displayed on the front page of each blog. It is centered in the middle of the weblog layout. Bausch et al. refer to it as "the primary building block of a weblog" (Bausch et al., 92) as shown in the screenshot of the blog entry taken from the blog hosting site <http://www.dailykos.com>



**Figure 2.** A screenshot of a blog entry

Bausch et al. define a post by a set of variables such as author, date, time, content category and number of comments. What a post is and what function it serves is self-explanatory. Aside from the time a post was made, who made the post, and the exact location of that post, a common piece of metadata seen on weblogs is some sort of categorization, or some form of title or subject for each post. Depending on the weblog system used to manage a weblog, there is the ability to add a subject or title above each post, and organize posts into any number of categories of one’s choice. For the body of the post, it may contain a text, an image or a combination of the two. It may also include links generally represented by an underlined text of a different color. Yet, links are various. There are external links linking to other blogs, other websites or external documents. There are also internal links linking to previous posts or audio or video files.

A-list blogs constitute a very rich corpus for exploration. Mckenna and Pole surveyed the authors of the most widely read political blogs to determine who blogs, how popular bloggers use their blogs and what impact political blogging has on traditional forms of political

participation. More recently, Adamic and Glance have analyzed the posts of 40 'A-List' political blogs during two months prior to the 2004 presidential election in order to determine topics and actors which were most frequently discussed. However, little has been said about intertextuality made possible by the blogging functionalities.

Depending on their form, web-mediated intertextuality enacts certain activities, aligns agents across time and space and affects the US politics. According to Fenwick and Edwards, it is "performative" (Fenwick and Edwards 24). It acts, together with other types of forces, to invite, exclude or regulate particular forms of political participation. Circulating from one blog entry to another, intertextual practices- those that embed language such as news sources, editorials, extracts from speeches, and social media postings etc...- mediate an interaction between bloggers and other human and non-human actors. They are not only cultural and discursive texts but they are also material (Fenwick and Edwards 24) as they enact dispersed local interactions. Their significance does not reside in what they mean but in what they do. Before following the effects of mobility created by these intertextual practices populating blog entries, key features of such a phenomenon should be highlighted.

In a mediated environment, intertextuality works via the web, hence the term "web-mediated intertextuality". Very often, it refers to the creation of relationships between texts of various types and from various sources via the mediation of the functionalities the web affords, and the meaning created by those relationships. In this sense, a blog entry will be viewed as a "mosaic of quotations" in the terminology of Kristeva (60). Its meaning will depend on the reader's knowledge and understanding of transported texts and the ability to apply that understanding to the original entry. Therefore, transported texts have equal value to the original blog entry. This is consistent with Riffaterre's claim that transported texts play an active role in creating intertextual meaning although he is of the view that meaning does not come from outside the text (45).

These transported texts exist in what Riffaterre terms "the intertext", the set of textual fragments from multiple texts that is referenced by the blog entries in both explicit and implicit ways. For Riffaterre, the intertext is unique to the text which references it. The meaning is not complete unless it is looked at through the lens of the intertext (Riffaterre 142). However, meaning-making, for him, occurs within the text itself with the intertext as a supporter. Unlike Riffaterre, Barthes argues that the intertext is much more than mere support. He envisions it as

a representative of cultural knowledge and experience gained from all of the texts connected in a network (156). Consequently, a blog entry will be approached as a dialogical platform. It is woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural language, antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast sterophony" (Barthes 159-160). It is hardly possible, thus, to escape the intertext in the analysis of A-list blogs and, in doing that, there is movement.

It is also important to note that the intertext entails the existence of gaps. Filling these gaps requires following transported texts regardless of their types or sources. Readers are, thus, required to perform an action whether it is interpretation, substitution or juxtaposition. The action required to fill the gap may depend upon the type of intertextuality and whether the gap reveals itself explicitly or implicitly. In this waltz of filling gaps, there is again movement. Accordingly, web-mediated intertextuality will be approached as a network of transported texts accessed through the intertext which identify gaps in the original text. Enacting the weblog technology allows following such a network which reveals important information that explains or speaks to the original text (Bolter, 38; Landow 189).

Appealing to the weblog technology in the analysis of mediated intertextuality is of paramount importance because human interaction is very often "localized, framed, held in check" (Latour 238) by non-human actors. Granting the non-human agency has various implications. To start with, objects are no longer the objective entities. They become "comrades, colleagues, partners, accomplices or associates in the weaving of social life (Latour 235). Besides, the concept of action has been modified. As soon as objects are considered in weaving intertextuality, the source of action becomes uncertain since action is no longer the property of humans. It is rather the outcome of an association of actants.

This shift to performative conceptualization of actors foregrounds a focus on the traces A-list bloggers leave. The ultimate goal is following the various instances of intertextuality and the dynamics of their transportation. Yet, intertextuality is not something given in a text or just a matter of "simple reiterations of a string of words from a previous text" (Bloome 255). It is, rather, a construct that may serve multiple functions challenging extant definitions of language, discourse, social interaction and refocusing attention on the social dynamism inherent in language and culture. It seems essential to grasp the principles by which the community of

bloggers constructs relationships of meaning between blog entries and even between parts of the same entry.

To explore the way intertextuality shapes the blog entries selected for this study, this article opts for actor-network theory (henceforth, ANT). Based on the “actor/actant-network theory,” interaction will be facilitated by the major affordances of the weblog technology and the actors abilities in using those affordances in a specific social and cultural context. A-list bloggers are understood as users in context and their output is contextually constructed. The technological affordances that characterize weblog technology are not clearly stated, rather they need, as mentioned by Hutchby, to be empirically investigated to deduce its major possibilities and constraints. Insight into the American political context will be of great value to understand the dynamics of the weblog technology and the link between the material, the textual, the individual, and the ideological.

Before exploring the particulars of web-mediated intertextuality through the lens of ANT, it is important to highlight that ANT is a material semiotic paradigm that could be used to explore the agency of non-human entities in the social world. By emphasizing that society comes into being through complex associations of heterogeneous actors, ANT ascribes a more active role to material artifacts and creates new possibilities for understanding social relations without reverting to technologically or socially determinist arguments as Law says as if certain phenomena are given in the order of things. He writes:

Nothing that enters into relations has fixed significance or attributes in and of itself. Instead the attributes of any particular element in the system, any particular node in the network, are entirely defined in relation to other elements in the system, to other nodes in the network. (Law 4)

From this perspective, the weblog technology will be viewed not as a neutral tool regulated by human intentions, but rather as fundamental resource and trigger of action. In his book entitled *Reassembling the Social*, Latour argues that the actions performed by non-human are taken beyond causality, determination and intention. Material artefacts can also suggest, allow, constrain, invite, shape and prescribe different forms of interaction. It may also enable to describe how relations are established, how they function, and which effects they have.

In an ANT sense, an actor-named also an actant, is any agent that can associate, change associations, and dissociate with other agents. When associated, actant establish what Law has named a "semiotic relationality". They define and reshape each other (Law 146). This means that each time an association is formed, actants acquire "new attributes, new purposes and new functions"(Latour 182). The association the weblog technology-human shows not only how technologies acquire agency, but also how actor-networks are formed. A network means, in this context, the capacity of the weblog technology to trigger action in the community of A-list blogs. Consequently, any actor-network is temporary associations between different agents, in which each agent is transformed as interactions are performed.

To follow the networking made possible by the weblog technology, Latour's seminal work *Reassembling the social* points out some practical ways for conducting ANT-based analysis: Follow the connections, go slow, look closely, and keep everything flat. To follow the connections means to look at the intertextual practices generated by bloggers to see how new connections are forged and how others are broken. To do that, it is necessary to go slowly, creating an account of how bloggers interact with each other and particularly paying attention to the less visible actors. It is also necessary to look closely at the details, to observe carefully how intertextuality is performed and the way they are populating the analyzed blog entries.

## **Method**

Consistent with ANT, this study follows the recurrent intertextual associations created by the community of A-list bloggers in their blog entries (henceforth, BE). Following these associations is form of content analysis. Generally, content analysis helps describe the content of data via systematic, objective and quantitative procedure. Conducting a content analysis does not mean identifying specified characteristics of text as being true or false; it rather measures the presence of those characteristics. It is based on inferences made from interpretation of the content of the posted material in light of prescribed research questions. In a similar vein, Carley asserts that content analysis "focuses on the frequency with which words or concepts occur in texts or across texts" (725).

For this, a weblog sample of 497 blog entries written by 39 American bloggers was selected. The absence of a complete directory of blogs made it difficult to opt for a random sampling procedure. Therefore, a purposive sampling strategy was used. The top single

authored, political blogs were identified. Popularity was reflected by the high number of comments per post. Additionally, the selection of A-list blogs was theoretically justified by the regularity of posting and opinion sharing among elites. The article also took advantage of the classification provided by blog aggregators of political blogs across the ideological spectrum. The rationale behind including blog entries that lean to the left and to the right was: (i) circumvent confining the corpus to one type of posting or potential readership; (ii) ensure that a wide set of weblogs across the ideological spectrum was included minimizing thereby the risk of an overly focused perspective to American politics.

The corpus of the present study was limited to a three-month period ranging from February to April 2016. The choice of such time span was motivated by the fact that it witnessed a surge in the national American political news and international events. Following a selected time period would provide a better example of the way the 2016 presidential race was run by candidates as well as by parties. For each blogger, five entries per date were retrieved. They were the first, seventh, fifteenth, twenty-first and twenty-eighth. The time frame enabled to follow presidential primaries, election campaigns and polling results.

Once the corpus of blog entries was selected and retrieved, the network of links were quantified and the intertextual structure were highlighted. This is consistent with Riffaterre's claim that texts contain gaps to be filled by the function of intertextuality. The hyperlinks are the gaps, and the texts they link to are the gap- fillers. The linked texts function as the intertext, or cultural information in the terminology of Barthes. The current study is based on the premise that hyperlinks are an overt form of intertextuality. Restricting the scope of analysis to the network structure of hyperlinks does not undermine the significance of other direct and indirect discourse representation. Because texts can link to multiple texts, the hypertextual network of texts could extend indefinitely. For this reason, the focus was mainly on the hyperlinks, regardless of their types, in the blog entries, and not those in the texts linked to.

### **Results**

In line with ANT, web-mediated intertextuality is a network effect of associations made possible by an interactivity between A-list bloggers and the technology in use. Such a network is visible by the structure of hyperlinks that typified the bodies of the blog entries. The

statistical analysis revealed a considerable amount of internal and external links. Their distribution within and across the community of bloggers is summarized in the table below:

**Table 1.** Linking pattern in the corpus of blog entries

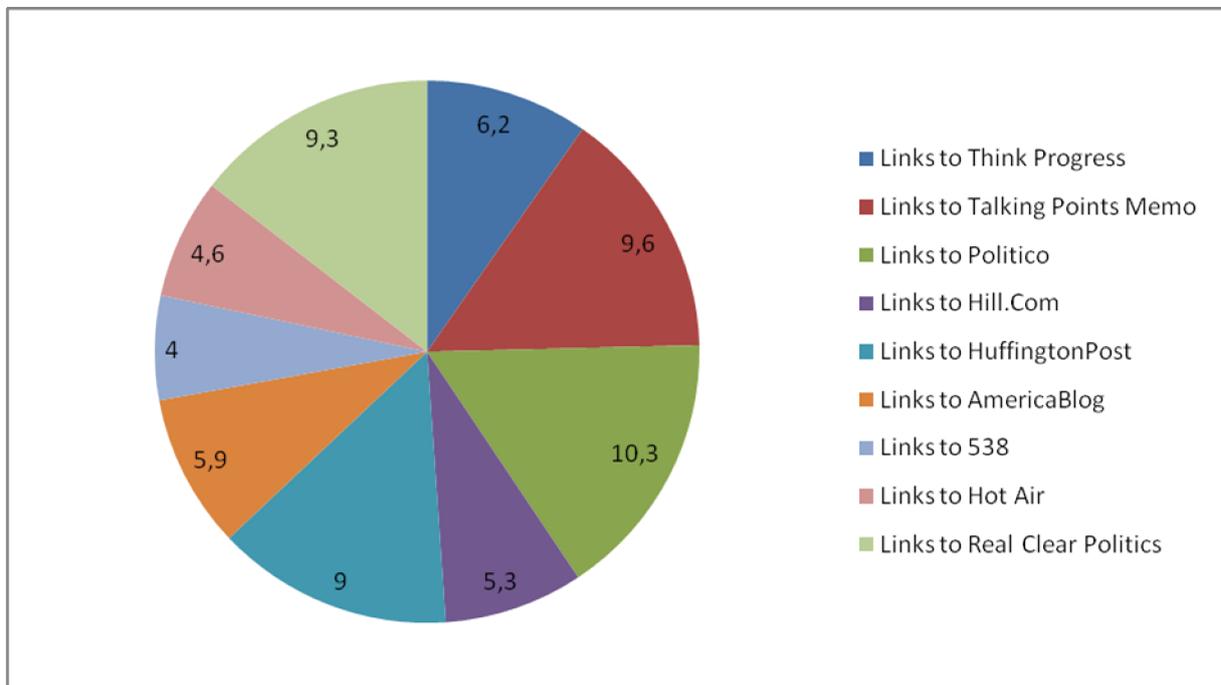
<b>Link type</b>	<b>Frequency of occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage of occurrence</b>
●Links to other blogs	320	12.5
●Links to previous posts	528	20.6
●Links to websites by other bloggers		
●Links to social media	341	13.3
●Links to websites created by or about the self	169	6.6
●Links to news sources	58	2.2
	1183	46.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>2554</b>	<b>99.7</b>

As shown above, links to previous posts by the same blogger were significantly present in the corpus of blogs analyzed with a percentual value of 20.3. They were self-reference links that link links to bloggers' earlier posts. Below is an example of self-reference links.

*I remember it quite well. And what remember is this: Whereas Barak Obama voiced his support for the position of Prime David Cameron' government in London, [Republicans brought Netanyahu to congress](#) specifically to torpedo the Iran policy of the current president of the United States. As I put it in [March 2015](#). (BE 70)*

The excerpt above was posted on April twenty eighth, 2016 at 9:08 post meridiem. It contained two links. While the first link referred back to previous entry written by the same author and posted on Monday, November ninth, 2015 at 9:37 post meridiem, the second pointed out to an entry posted by the same author on March ninth at 10:16 post meridiem. The embedment of different times in the same blog entry confirms Latour’s claim of the dislocality of action. The blogging practice was made possible by the transported presence of embedded times and distant interactions.

A-list political communities also linked to one another. Out of 1416 links, there was a total of 320 links to other blogs distributed across the ideological spectrum with 198 links to Left- leaning blog entries and 122 links to Right-leaning posts. Linking to other blogs was an intertext which was used to show the sources on which blog authors build their opinions. By providing links to external content, A- list political bloggers strengthened their position by criticizing rivals in the 2016 election contest. The intertextual pattern within the community of bloggers of the same ideological orientation marked the blogging practice across communities. Liberal bloggers linked to other liberal-leaning posts, but they also linked to right-leaning posts. The distribution of the linking pattern within the Left-leaning blogging community is revealed below:



**Figure3.** Distribution of the linking pattern in left-leaning blogs

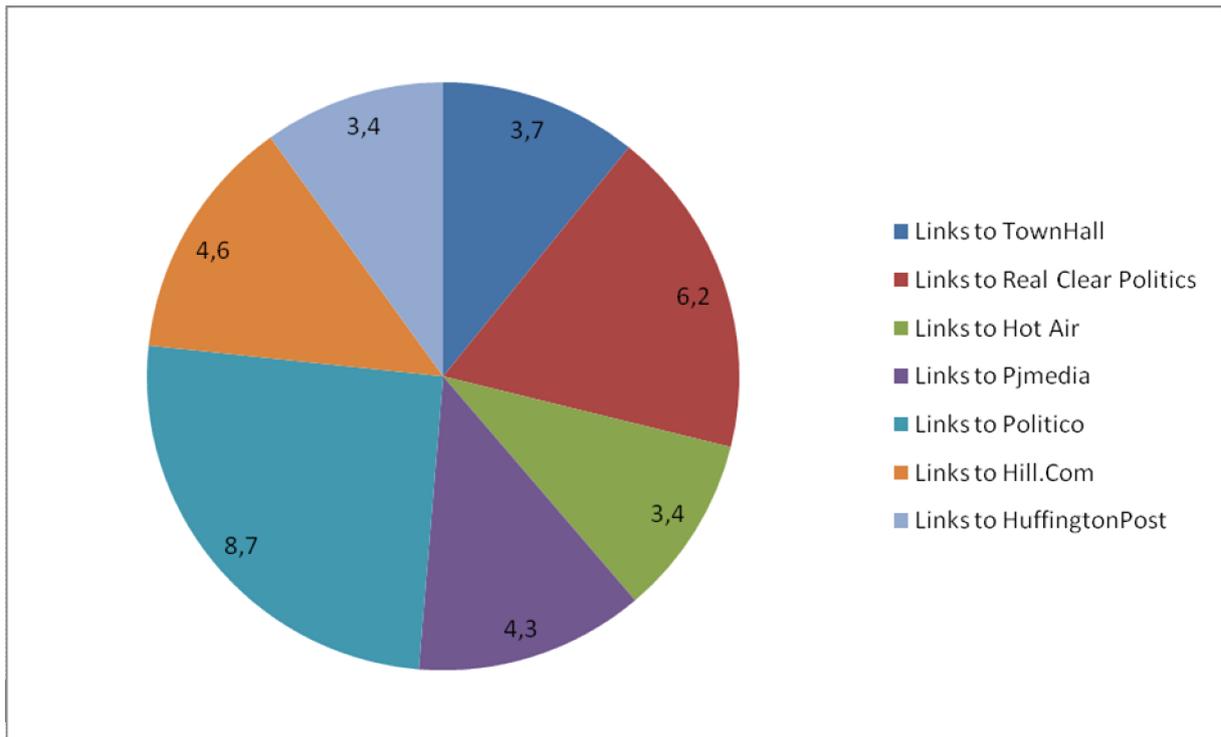
The figure above shows that links to other blogs within the left-leaning community were concentrated among a smaller subset of top liberal blogs such as *Politico* with a percentual value of 10.3 followed by *Talking Points Memo* with 9.6 percent out of a total of 320 links to other Left-leaning entries. *Huffington Post* was also frequently linked to by the liberal community with a considerably significant percentage compared to other Left-leaning blogging sites such as the *Hill. Com* and *AmericaBlog*. Below is an extract from a Left-leaning BE 97. Posted on February fifteenth, 2016 at 5: 01PM in which there are instances of links to other Liberal blogs:

*Sen. Elizabeth Warren has [skewered](#) Republican arguments that president Obama should wait for the next president to pick a replacement for Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia so that the American can speak.... Sen. Chuck Schumer expected to become Senate democratic leader When Harry Reid retires next year, [joined in](#) blasting McConnell for his obstruction, predicting he wouldn't be able to sustain it.(BE97)*

The first links to *Huffington Post.com* and the second links to *Politico.com*. Both sites were classified by blog aggregators as politically-oriented to the left. However, cross-citing was relatively significant in the corpus of Left-leaning entries. It accounted for 17.9 percent of the total number of links to conservative blogs. BE 70 by X 5 illustrates an instance of cross-citation:

*President Obama's [forceful statements](#) in support of the UK in the European Union made waves on both sides of the Atlantic. (...) but here in the US. , the conservatives from whom Johnson appropriated his birther talking point regurgitated their own misguided sound. As Lary O'Connor of [Hot Air](#) puts it. (BE 70)*

Though the excerpt is taken from a Left-leaning blog entry, it contains a link to a Right-leaning blog namely *Hot Air.com*. In a similar vein, a network of connections was traced within and across Right-leaning blogs. The following figure is a visualization of such a network.



**Figure 4.** The distribution of the linking pattern in right-leaning blogs.

Similar to the liberal blogosphere, the linking pattern in Right-leaning blog entries was centered on a smaller set of top conservative blogs such as *Town Hall* with 3.7 percent, *Real Clear Politics* with 6.2 percent and *Hot Air* with 3.4 percent. *Pjmedia* was also linked to with a precentual value of 4.3. Linking to similar oriented blog entries within the right blogging community accounted for 17.6 percent. This is a lower percentage compared to the percentage of Liberal bloggers linking to other liberal bloggers which exceeded 46.

Posted by Y 10, BE 314 contains instances of intra and inter-linking between A-list political bloggers.

*The battle for Iowa is finally here as caucus goers prepare to cast the first votes of the 2016 presidential election tonight in the Hawkeye State. According to the [Associated Press](#), over \$200 million has been spent on advertising....While Clinton pulls in a few hundred voters at campaign events and is ahead in the polls, Sanders has been pulling in thousands, including many college students who aren't necessarily counted in [polling](#).*(BE 314)

While the first links to a previous post by the same blogger, the second links to the Left-leaning site *Huffington Post.com*. Therefore, a reciprocal connection within and across the Liberal and the Conservative political communities was established.

Further link types coded in the data sample were links to websites, links to social media and video links. These external links gave relevant further information on the issues discussed. Links to websites created not by blog authors were significantly present in the analyzed corpus with 13.3 percent of mentions in both Left and Right leaning blog entries (See BE212). Out of the five link types highlighted in red, there are three links to websites and two links to news sources. Therefore, web-mediated content created by other agencies was transformed into the blog entries studied. Such transformation is made possible by the mediation of the technology in use.

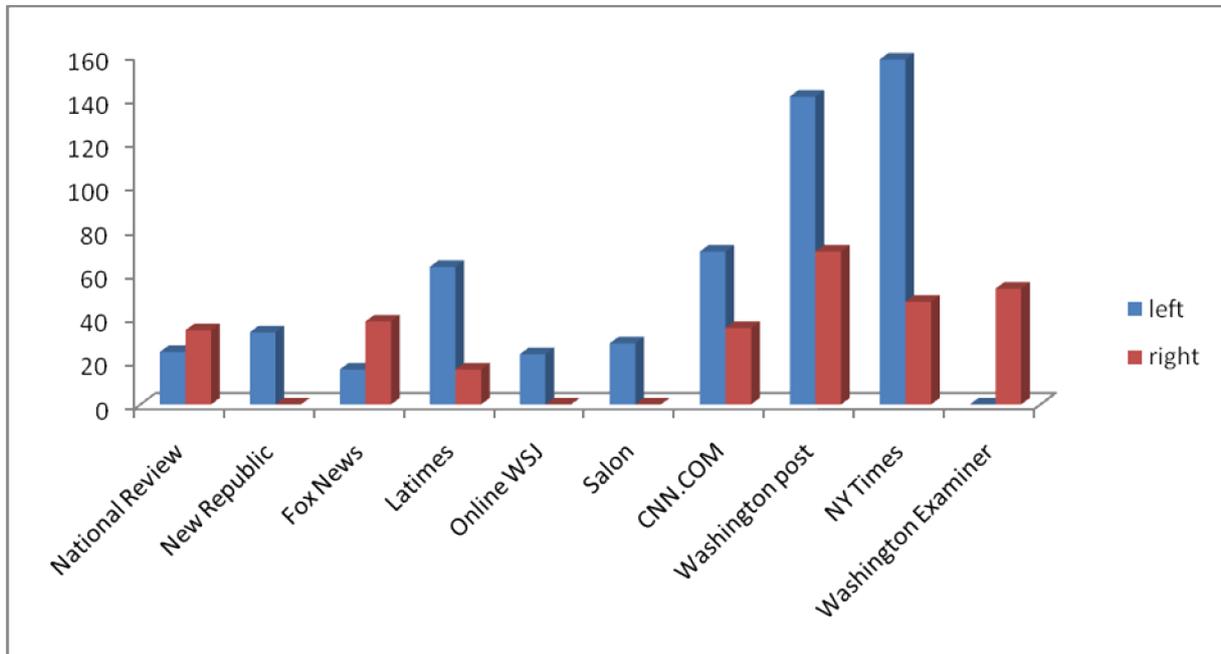
Multiple social media were also linked to in the analyzed corpus. In step with ANT, enacting the linking functionality enabled the community of A-list bloggers to transport further intertextual practices from social media with a percentage of 6.6. Below is a sample of an entry in which there are instances of links to social media, namely Twitter.

*Having been defeated by Trump among evangelicals and really struggling among non-evangelicals. It's very premature to write Cruz off (Think of delegate rich Texas)-Erick Erickson is jumping to gun with this analysis, I think- but last night 's results raise several red flags for the Cruz camp. With Ben Carson and John Kasich sticking around for now, time is beginning to run short in the quest for a not- Trump unifying alternative candidate to emerge from.(BE 295)*

Taken from BE 295 posted by X15, the excerpt above highlighted the Republican candidate Donald Trump as a leader of “an intense three-man fight on GOP side.” Five out of six links highlighted above were links to Twitter.com. These live- tweets reported the election results in South Carolina.

Further instances of intertextuality were links to news sources. The total number of links to news sources was 1138. They were unequally distributed between the right and the left leaning blogs. Left-leaning-blog entries cited media sources 556 while Right-leaning blog entries cited the same sources only 364. In total, 920 links were to most popular online news sources while 218 links were relatively distributed across less frequently cited sites. The

figure below shows the most popular online news sites and the proportion of Left and Right blog entries linking to them during the time period selected for the present study.

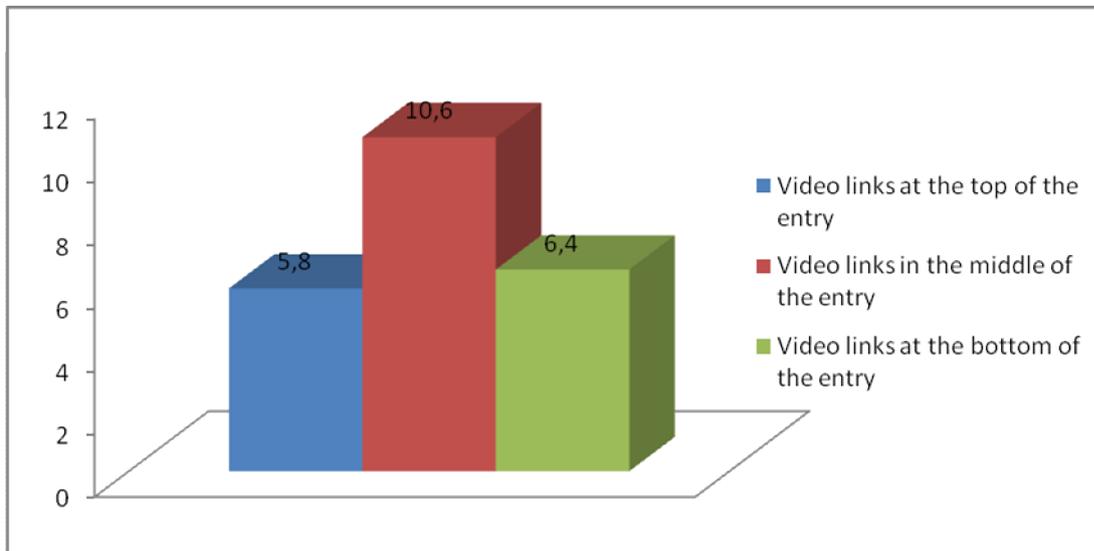


**Figure 5.** Most linked to news sources by Conservative and Liberal blog entries in the data sample

As shown in the figure above, *NY times* and *Washington Post* received the majority of their links from Left-leaning blog entries while *Washington Examiner* and *National Review* received the majority of their links from Right-leaning blogs. In addition, *CNN. Com*, *Latimes.Com* and the *New Republican* received the majority of their links from Right-leaning bloggers. However, *Washington Examiner* and *Fox News* were predominantly linked to by conservative bloggers. *Salon* and *Online Wall Street Journal.Com* were mainly linked to by Left bloggers. In a similar vein, *Washington Examiner* was linked to by conservative bloggers.

Yet, cross-linking to the same news sources was also apparent in the data sample. That was the case for *Washington Post*, *National Review* and *NY Times* just to mention a few. The findings of the content analysis supported the claim that blogs with similar ideology were more likely to link to each other. Left-leaning blogs were more likely to link to other left leaning blogs when compared to their links to Right-leaning blogs. Similarly, right-leaning blogs showed a tendency to link to blogs that share the same ideological orientation.

A significant proportion of blog entries in the data sample had embedded video links. These links transported electoral campaign events into the weblog platform, and in doing that, they either supported or criticized an agenda. The statistical analysis revealed an unequal distribution of video links across the organizational structure of blog entries as shown in the figure below:



**Figure 6.** Distribution of video links in the data sample

As revealed above, 10.6 percent of video links were inserted in the middle of the entries and 12.2 of the same types of links were used at the top or at the bottom. Though the frequency of occurrence of video links remained low with a total number of 114 distributed across 497 blog entries, their presence could be attributed to the multimedia potential available for the community of A-list political bloggers.

The Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump was the focus of video links in the left-leaning blog entries. Trump’s offensive comments and violent behaviors were shown via video links. His “*vulgar and divisive rhetoric*” targeted protesters in Barak Obama’s terms (BE 227). BE 280 contained a video link showing a White Trump supporter kicking black protestor at a rally. In a similar vein, BE 32 provided a video link showing tearful Voldost students at Trump rally. In a related post entitled “Man shouting racial slurs shot at Texas candidates’ Head Quarters on election eve”, a Texas white man yelled racial slurs at the campaign workers and supporters of Democratic candidate for Jefferson County Sheriff Zena Stephens’ headquarters.

Donald Trump’s offensive comments targeted also news reporters. They were documented via the video link available in BE 190 where Donald Trump called “reporters disgusting”. Trump repeatedly called the media “scum” and the “absolute worst” during his election campaign. X10 stated that “*a Wall Street Journal reporter said he was spat on during a Trump event, and last month a photographer was slammed to the group while he tried to photograph protesters at a rally*” (BE 190). Donald Trump’s vulgar rhetoric was even documented by conservatives. Trump, in a video link, used the word “collude” meaning “go to jail” to accuse his rivals Ted Cruz and John Kasich (BE 249).

From Right bloggers’ perspective, a great proportion of blog entries focused on the Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and the Democratic race. A video link posted on March seventh, 2016 at 9:05 ante meridiem emphasized Hillary Clinton’s assertion that she did not email any classified material, an assertion that contradicted with the content of the following excerpt taken from an entry written by X 15:

*The 2000-plus classified emails –which include dozens of secret, top secret and above top secret messages- comprehensively, destroy the former Secretary's initial claim that there were “no classified material on her server. When that lie was easily exposed, a secondary claim she advanced was she personally neither sent nor received classified emails. We already knew this to be false, but now we have a clearer idea of just how inaccurate it was via the Washington Post.* (BE 294)

Related to the Democratic Party, conservative bloggers severely criticized Obama healthcare policy. In BE 362, X18 called such a policy “fail of the day”. The entry contained a video link detailing \$ 55 Billion waste in Obamacare.

Links to images were also recurrent in the analyzed corpus of blogs. Their distribution was rather irregular with a mean average of 0.7 per blog entry as shown below:

**Table 2.** Distribution of image across the corpus of blogs

Image types	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage	Mean
●Photos	●279	●77.7	●0.7
●Cartoons	●54	●15	●0.1

●Scans	●26	●72	●0.07
<b>Total</b>	359	99.9	0.8

The table above demonstrates that photographs were the most frequent type of visuals linked to in the corpus. 215 out of 279 photos described 2016 presidential candidates. However, 64 images showed presidential race-related events. These events described campaign trails, debates and/or victories. BE 45, for instance, contained an image of both Democratic and Republican voters casting their votes in presidential primaries. Likewise BE 50 displayed an image of the Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton delivering a victory speech to supporters at an event on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016 in Columbia, South Carolina. Likewise, parties' debates were highly present in the images traced in the corpus of political blogs under focus. The Democratic debate in Brooklyn or in Flint was the focus of both BE 223 and 235. Republican-related events were also shown in BE 411 where Donald Trump's Super Tuesday victories in various American cities were celebrated. Similar to photographs, cartoons were centered round both Republican and Democratic presidential candidates. They constituted 15 percent of the total of images contained in the corpus of blog entries. However, the least visible visuals were scans. They represented only 7.2 percent of the total number of visuals.

The distribution of presidential candidates' photos across the ideological spectrum revealed a considerable overlap between Left- leaning and Right- leaning blog entries. The statistical analysis of the total number of mentions of republican candidates' photos in the left-leaning blog entries were considerably higher than the total number of mentions of Republican candidates' photos in the right-leaning entries. While the percentage of mention of Republican candidates' photos exceeded 45 percent in Left-leaning blog entries, Democratic candidates' photos did not go beyond 21 percent in the same data set. However, the percentage of mention of Democratic candidates' photos in right-leaning blog entries was only 7.6 percent compared to the presence of Republican candidates' photos in Right-leaning entries which were considerably higher with a percent value of 25.7.

Liberal bloggers presented Republican candidates with an unfavorable image. The image of Donald Trump as "the emperor of women haters" was the focus of BE 237. Even Trump's campaign manager was presented as "physically violent with a female reporter" in BE 256. Right-leaning posts, however, focused on photos that highlighted the three

Republican candidates or “a three-way GOP tie” in the terminology of BE 292 while reporting Iowa polls. The image of the winner was commonly used in Right-leaning entries. Donald Trump, the winner of South Carolina Primary was the focus of BE 319. BE 321 entitled “No violence incitement charges for Donald Trump” brightened the Republican presidential candidate and contradicted opponents’ claims.

Even when introduced, Right-leaning bloggers projected unfavorable images of Democratic candidates. Hillary Clinton, for example, was associated with scandals as in the blog entry posted February 15, 2016 or “foul-mouthed bad temper ” as reported in BE 420. In such an entry, the image of the Democratic candidate Hillary was associated with violence as she “blew a gasket at a green peace provocateur who asked Hillary Clinton about fossil fuel donation” (BE 420).

The content and distribution of images brought to the front other local interactions dispersed in different American cities. This is generally congruent with Latour's claim that any form of interaction presupposes the transportation of events from different places and distant times and by multiple agents (*Reassembling the Social* 187). Most of them reported leaning voters casting their votes in both primaries and caucuses, presidential candidates delivering victory speeches to supporters and campaign trails and rallies, debates, polling results etc... The alternation between photos, cartoons and scans shaped the enactment of election-related events. Their content highlighted a tension not only between rivals in the same party but also between competing campaigning camps. Being transformed from their original sites, images made visible an interactive pattern between bloggers, image producers and viewers. It also connected candidates and leaning supporters.

Liberal and conservative bloggers linked primarily within their separate communities, with remarkable cross-linking between them. This division creates separate networks, yet interconnected regarding their focus on news sources, topics and political figures. Different news sources, multiple blogs as well as various types of social media were translated by bloggers due to the functionality of hyperlinking. The linking pattern in the data sample provided a tangible representation of the sources and influences on blog content. They were a mere reflection of the raw material, media and interpersonal influences that shape the form as well as the content of the weblog genre. Following these hyperlinks showed further local interactions that did not have the same local presence and did not come from the same time.

Some of these interactions happened at the federal level, others occurred in Congress or Senate while some others took place in different American cities.

Through links Barak Obama voiced his support of the United Kingdom in the European Union while Republicans brought Netanyahu to Congress to torpedo the Iran Deal. It was also through links that the Republican parties' Super Tuesday victories were celebrated while a conservative organization released advertisements featuring female voters reading Donald Trump verbatim quotes about women. In the Senate, the Supreme Court vacancy was debated and the Republican obstructionism was weaved. Caucuses and primaries as well as poll results were followed in the data sample.

The linking pattern in the analyzed weblog genre highlighted the active role of blog hosting sites, advertising and media companies as well in shaping both offline and online campaign events. Their coverage was selected and employed to enroll and mobilize leaning voters. Taking advantage of Trump's racial events, the liberal blogging community sought to align further supporters. Similarly, the Republican community took advantage of Clinton's email scandals and Obama's healthcare policy to enroll right leaning supporters. It was in these Oligoticons in the terminology of Latour that the 2016 presidential race was crafted (276).

Being transformed from their original positions through the functionalities of the web, mediated intertextuality reflected not only an interaction pattern between bloggers, journalists, supporters, companies, official sites, candidates and social media users to name a few but also a translation process to align initially diverse interests, and in this waltz of alignment, there is movement. To view these textual artefacts as either the products of bloggers choice or as passive intermediaries controlled through bloggers' action is to undermine their power and their contribution in enacting political participation and mobilizing leaning voters. It is also to overlook the complex effects that these textual practices produce. As they moved from one American city to another, bloggers created hybrid blog entries in which conflicting voices can co-exist, different modes of expressions are enacted and plural interpretations are performed.

## **Conclusion**

In line an ANT-based analysis, A-list blogs were built out of texts from the present and from the past. As soon as the multimedia and linking functionalities were made active, dispersed intertextual patterns roam again in the blogging platform crafting associations

between a network of actors that include blog hosting sites, mainstream and social media companies, official sites including the federal government, the congress and the Senate; organizations, candidates, supporters, leaning-voters just to name a few. Added to their connecting role, these intertexts afforded ways of understanding the way bloggers mobilized and enrolled leaning voters to stabilize a formed network and promote an adopted ideology. In doing that, they made their voice heard and took a role in wider processes of political change.

All types of intertexts provided considerable intertextual relationships that supported or contradicted a leaning political agenda. Texts that fell under the supporting relationship with the original blog entries were texts that provided a favorable image for the supported candidate. They often provided surplus information on the issues foregrounded and excluded the components that did not contribute to the promoted agenda. Some do so explicitly and directly, while others require the information contained within other parts of the intertextual networks to do so. Texts that fell under the contradicting relationship promoted, however, an unfavorable image of the opponent.

In step with the spirit of ANT, this study acknowledges that mediated intertextuality is heavily impacted by the active role of the weblog technology. The frequent use of hyperlinks in the corpus of blogs represents an absence of specific information within the original blog entries, which is filled by the content of the transported network of texts, the intertext. As soon as gap filling is enacted, the weblog technology associate with new agents and dissociate with others depending on the ideology promoted. This means each time a gap is filled, a new association is formed and consequently actants acquire "new attributes and new functions" using Latour's terminology (182). The way gap-filling is performed shows not only how the weblog technology acquires agency but also how actor-networks are formed.

Part of these networks were human, others were technical and textual while some others were political, legal, or economic. A-list bloggers are flattened to take a star-like shape. They became actor-networks which were made to act by a web of mediators. They became a composite, an assemblage of myriad entities. They were defined by their intertextual activities, the opinions they shared, the verbal and non-verbal choices they opted for as well as the thematic concerns they backgrounded or foregrounded. Tracing intertextuality might, then, be seen as an attempt of reassembling dispersed entities and dislocated events.

As we move from one blog entry to another, multiple entities are assembled and reassembled together and continually shape one another. Every time an intertext pops up, a new association is formed and new types of entities were transformed through it. This presupposes movement and translation of initially diverse interests. Such a process is made possible by the enactment of the multimedia potential of the weblog technology which has strengthened the link between writing and mobility. Bloggers create communities through an interaction with a targeted audience and validate themselves through the mediation of textual and technical practices. Doing that, they need to move and take advantage of multiple semiotic intertextual practices since linguistic meaning-making is only one aspect of every actual instance of meaning-making.

Two types of limitations having to do with data selection should be mentioned. First, the focus of analysis was on A-list blogs. This is not to claim that non A-list blogs are irrelevant from intertextual perspective. Future research could conduct an ANT analysis on non-A- List blogs or non-political blogs. Second. Excluding direct and indirect discourse representations from the scope of intertextual analysis may affect the generalizability of the study's findings.

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