"INTELLECTUALLY EXHAUSTED AND
INCREASINGLY DESPERATE"
VERSUS
"FLAT-OUT FALSE AND REEKS OF DESPERATION":

How the blogs of the candidates in the American presidential
election of 2012 create a negative image of the opponent

Master's Thesis
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Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kielten laitos
Tekijä – Author Niina Malinen	
Työn nimi – Title "Intellectually exhausted and increasingly desperate" versus "flat-out false and reeks of desperation": How the blogs of the candidates in the American presidential election of 2012 create a negative image of the opponent	
Oppiaine – Subject Englanti	Työn laji – Level Pro gradu -tutkielma
Aika – Month and year Kesäkuu 2015	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 101 sivua

Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Negatiivinen kampanjointi on arkipäivää kaikissa vaaleissa Yhdysvalloissa ja se on kuulunut siellä jo pitkään kampanjointiperinteisiin. Negatiivisesta kampanjoinnista on tehty paljon tutkimusta, mutta näkökulma on usein liittynyt esimerkiksi television tai internetin vaalimainontaan, siihen, miten negatiivisuus vaikuttaa äänestäjiin ja äänestysaktiivisuuteen tai mikä on negatiivisuuden kohteena. Vähemmän on tutkittu lähivuosina yleistyneiden blogien käyttöä kampanjoinnissa ja erityisesti negatiivisen kampanjoinnin välineenä.

Tämä tutkimus tarkastelee sitä, kuinka Yhdysvaltain vuoden 2012 presidentinvaaliehdokkaiden, Barack Obaman ja Mitt Romneyn, kampanjablogit yrittivät luoda negatiivista kuvaa vastaehdokkaasta. Toisin sanoen tarkastelun kohteena on eksplisiittisen negatiiviset viittaukset vastustajaan. Tarkastelen erilaisia negatiivisuuden strategioita, joita käyttämällä ehdokkaiden blogit rakentavat negatiivisuutta kilpailijaansa kohtaan. Käyttämällä osin aiemmassa tutkimuksessa luotuja kategorioita ja hyödyntämällä muokattua versiota grounded theory -menetelmästä luon kahdeksan strategiakategoriaa, joiden avulla pyrin kuvaamaan kyseistä ilmiötä. Sen lisäksi, että selvitän, mitä strategioita blogit hyödyntävät, tutkin kumman ehdokkaan blogi oli negatiivisempi vastustajaa kohtaan.

Tutkimus osoitti, että Romneyn blogi oli kaiken kaikkiaan negatiivisempi kuin Obaman blogi. Tähän voi olla monia syitä, mutta yksi keskeisimmistä on se, että Romney oli haastaja näissä vaaleissa, kun taas Obama oli istuva presidentti. Tällöin on luonnollista, että haastajan täytyy heikommassa asemassa ollessaan hyökätä aggressiivisemmin vastustajaansa kohtaan. Ehdokkaiden lähtökohta vaalikampailuun oli siis varsin erilainen. Käytetyimpiä strategioita Romneyn blogissa olivat hyökkäykset Obaman presidenttinä harjoittamaa politiikkaa, tulevaisuudensuunnitelmia sekä tämän pätevyyttä kohtaan. Obaman blogissa eniten hyödynnettyjä strategioita olivat myöskin Romneyn esittämiä suunnitelmia vastaan hyökkääminen sekä tämän arvojen ja maailmankuvan kritisoiminen.

Työni antaa lisää tietoa blogien käytöstä vaalikampanjoinnissa ja erityisesti negatiivisuuden hyödyntämisestä vastaehdokasta kohtaan. Jatkotutkimuksessa olisi mielenkiintoista analysoida myös blogien kuva- ja videomateriaalia sekä implisiittisiä negatiivisuuden ilmauksia luotaessa negatiivista kuvaa vastustajasta.

Asiasanat – Keywords blogs, campaign communication, presidential elections, negativity, Barack Obama, Mitt Romney
Säilytyspaikka – Depository JYX
Muita tietoja – Additional information

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1   INTRODUCTION

Election campaigns in the United States have for a long time been characterized by increased negativity in how the opponent is discussed. It seems that every election year sees a more negative and aggressive array of campaigns trying to bring the opposing candidate down. Before, these attacks and negative appeals were presented through newspaper and television adverts as well as in speeches and press releases. During the recent decades, however, the Internet has gained prominence in all forms of campaigning and the negativity has been transferred to online platforms, as well. Today, every candidate in any election in America has their own website and its importance is widely acknowledged. However, the emergence and recent proliferation of the blog has added a new dimension to campaign websites. The first presidential election campaign in the U.S. that saw a blog used as a tool in campaigning was in 2004 (Baker and Stromer-Galley 2004, cited in Sweetser Trammell 2007: 1256). These campaign blogs can present a vast variety of different posts on any issue imaginable, and attacks against the opponent have gained their place in the blogs, too. What the use of websites and blogs has brought to campaigning is the increased power given to the candidates and their campaign staff to decide what to post to the public and how to discuss the opponent, for instance. The candidates, in other words, have free reign over the content; particularly when compared to the amount of influence they can have over content written about them in traditional media, such as newspapers.

The use of the Internet in electoral campaigning has been studied quite extensively as has the use of negativity towards the opponent (see e.g. Tedesco 2011, Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010, Lau, Sigelman and Rovner 2007, Geer 2006). There have been a great deal of studies on negative campaigning in terms of how it is perceived by voters and if it, for instance, influences their perceptions of the candidates or decreases voter turnout, studies on the negative advertising on television and online, as well as on the target of negativity. Nevertheless, there exists a gap in the field on negative campaigning through blogs and on how negativity about the opponent is created on them, and this gap is what my thesis attempts to fill.

The specific aim of my thesis is to analyze the blogs on the American presidential candidates', Barack Obama's and Mitt Romney's, websites during the 2012 election. Both of the sites have a blog, which was regularly updated several times a day. Both websites include information on different policy issues and the candidate's stance on various topics, and these

sections on the sites have references to the other candidate and his opinions on the same issues. However, these issue sections on the sites are fairly differently organized and therefore, I will concentrate on the blog sections of the sites as they are more similarly structured and therefore more easily comparable. Furthermore, my focus will be on the blog features of the websites also due to space limitations, and thus, it is not possible in this study analyze the entire websites of the candidates and how the opposing candidate is referred to, described, and how he and his politics are discussed. The blogs are a good link between the candidates and the voters, which makes them a very interesting feature, although of course the candidates themselves rarely update the blogs. Nevertheless, the blogs are the sections of the websites that are the most up to date and the most active.

I aim to look at how each candidate is represented on the other candidate's blog. The image that is created of the opposing candidate is often negative, which is only natural since presidential elections are a competition on the highest level of politics, and which is also visible in my data after initial observations. Thus, I will focus on analyzing how this negative image is created. In this thesis, I will only focus on the textual part of the blogs. There is also video content and pictures included in many of the posts, but for reasons of space, I will restrict myself to study only the textual content. In a broader study, it would be useful to analyze the picture content of the posts as well since they often complement the message in the texts.

An additional point of interest to consider in my research is the amount of negativity in the blogs. Following Geer's (2006) definition, by negativity I mean criticism of the other candidate and his policies, arguments against him, and references that use linguistic expressions that clearly show disdain for the opposing candidate. I will count the posts with negativity against the opponent as well as the specific instances of negativity according to my definition and divide them into categories. I will then compare the results between the two candidates' blogs and by doing this, compare the amount of negativity found in them. In other words, I aim to analyze whether the negativity is equally prominent on both candidates' blogs and then draw conclusions on whose online campaign is the most negative in tone, as far as the blogs are concerned. As my methodological basis, I will employ a grounded theory approach along with the constant comparative method. I devise my categories of analysis through these methods as well as by employing some of the campaign communication strategies presented by Trent and Friedenberg (2000).

Studying the use of negativity against the opponent in campaign blogs gives new insight into how old tactics of 'going negative' in campaigns are transferred to new media

platforms. The more unfiltered nature of attacking opponents in blogs gives another interesting angle to the study of negativity in campaigns. Overall, as people get information about the candidates increasingly online, it is relevant to study how the candidates discuss themselves, and maybe more importantly, their opponents.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I will present the concepts that are central to my study as well as give an overview of relevant previous research. Firstly, I will illustrate the use of the Internet and blogs in political campaigning. Secondly, I will present the concept of the image of a candidate, and thirdly, I will introduce central works in previous research in this field.

2.1 Using the Internet and the blog in campaigning

There has been plenty of research on the use of websites in campaigning, but less has been done on the use of blogs (see e.g. Wang 2010; Lawson-Borders and Kirk 2005). Today, we are in the age of Web 2.0, which according to Macnamara (2010: 33) refers to "a second generation of internet-based services (information and applications) that are open for collaboration and high levels f interactivity without requiring computer programming skills". The term Web 2.0 was first used by DiNucci in 1999 in a magazine article, but it was popularized by O'Reilly in a series of conferences regarding interactive media in 2004 (Macnamara 2010: 50). In comparison, the early Web, Web 1.0, was about one-way dissemination of information and was for the most part "remediation" of content, which could mean, for instance, transferring material from traditional media, such as newspapers, online without changing it at all or only minimally. Web 2.0 has brought interactivity online with blogs, chat rooms, wikis, video sharing websites, and many kinds of social networking sites, to name a few examples. At the core of Web 2.0 applications is that they encourage users to interact, contribute as well as produce and distribute their own content. (Macnamara 2010: 33-34.)

As was mentioned above, one of these Web 2.0 applications is the blog. Macnamara (2010) states that the first blog could be said to have surfaced in 1994 when Claudio Pinhanez launched the first Web pages that were in an online-diary format called *Open Diary*, and it was hosted on the MIT Media Lab Web site. Macnamara asserts that this could be thought of

as the first blog. (Macnamara 2010: 47.) Peter Merholz was the first person to abbreviate the term 'Weblog' to 'blog'. He did this in his journal-style website called *Peterme.com* and the abbreviated form became popular very quickly and begun to be used both as a noun and a verb when talking about this new type of writing on the Internet. (Macnamara 2010: 48.) The term 'blogosphere' was created in 2002 by William Quick, and it refers to the "intellectual cyberspace … bloggers occupy" (Macnamara 2010: 50). Lawson-Borders and Kirk (2005: 548) define it as the "ever-expanding universe of bloggers who link to news sites and each other". In the following, I will discuss both the use of the Internet and blogs in campaigning hand in hand, as they are inherently linked together.

Hendricks and Denton, Jr. (2010) describe the campaign of Bill Clinton in 1992 as the first one to utilize the Internet in an extensive way. He for example used it for spreading information through the use of e-mail and listserv (listserv is an "automatic mailing list server", Webopedia 2013). (Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 3.) In 1994, many candidates had their own websites but still, at this point, the Internet was used for political intentions mainly by nonprofits and interest groups. Furthermore, it has been reported that only 25,000 of the total number of over 100,000 candidates campaigning for public office in 1996 had their own web pages, which is a relatively small number. (Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 4.) However, in 2000, the emphasis of the growth of the Internet was on mobilizing voters and raising funds. Nevertheless, Wiese and Gronbeck (2005: 220, cited in Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 4) state that the Internet was then mainly used for "candidate and attitude reinforcement" rather than persuading people. They argue that this was a result of people who agreed with each other mostly doing the interacting (Wiese and Gronbeck 2005: 220, cited in Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 4). I am sure that this holds true still today to some extent, as it is typical that people interact with and are drawn to people who agree with them.

Even though the Internet was used in campaigning in the United States as early as 1992, Tedesco (2011: 696-697) cites the 2004 presidential election to be "the first Internet election", due to the fact that according to the report by Rainie, Cornfield and Horrigan (2005: i), 75 million Americans went online for political purposes. Lawson-Borders and Kirk (2005: 548) state that the presidential election of 2004 saw blogs become a standard feature on the candidates' websites. They refer to what the *Chicago Tribune* found during the 2004 Democratic convention that their readers read more stories on the paper's blogs than the actual news stories posted (The Media Center 2004, cited in Lawson-Borders and Kirk 2005: 554). Lawson-Borders and Kirk point out that this was a sign of the public viewing the blogs as not having a "corporate voice". Thus, the blog voice is perhaps seen as more relatable and

not serving the corporate agenda even though the source of the content would be a traditional journalistic one. (Lawson-Borders and Kirk 2005: 554.) I would suggest that political campaigns have chosen to use blogs and the blog voice, because people may view it as more authentic than if the same information would be presented in a news release by the campaign, for instance. As blogs are such a dominant and familiar feature of the Internet nowadays, it is no wonder that the campaigns have adopted this medium, as well.

Jones (cited in Williams and Tedesco 2006: 14, cited in Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 4) states that the presidential election of 2004 saw blogs becoming important for media outlets and for the campaigns as well as a tool through which to interact with voters. Williams and Tedesco (2006: 1, cited in Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 4) point out that during the 2004 election, 63 million people went online to search for political information and 52% of those who used the Internet said that the information they received online had an influence on their decision on whom to vote for. Overall, Hendricks and Denton, Jr. (2010: 4) state that the new technologies of MySpace (2003), Facebook (2004), and YouTube (2006) have had a rising political significance (year of their launch in parentheses). Wiese and Gronbeck (2005: 220, cited in Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 4-5) list important developments that happened during the 2004 election, and two of these are the progression of the candidates' web pages into a "standard genre of Web text" and the emergence of blogs.

However, it was during the mid-term elections of 2006 when the Internet, it was reported, was for the first time in history among the primary sources of information for the campaigns. Generally speaking, it has been said that the Democrats have used the new media better in campaigning than the Republicans. (Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 5.) I would suggest that this has also been a feature of subsequent elections as Obama's campaign in 2008 was another example of the mastery of the new media, as I will illustrate later, and thus showed an apparent disparity between the two parties' candidates.

In her article, Kaye (2008, n.pag) points out that the Internet had a major impact on the American presidential election of 2008. Her main focus is on the use of Internet ads but she also discusses the general impact that the Internet has had on election campaigns. She maintains that TV advertising was still in 2008 the key advertising medium but that during the previous couple of years the Internet had increased immensely in importance for campaigns. In the 2008 election, Barack Obama and John McCain were competing against each other for presidency, and Kaye points out that both candidates had vast and diverse Internet advertising campaigns. (Kaye 2008, n.pag.)

Kaye states that the candidates placed heavy focus on using Internet ads for fundraising purposes as well as for creating supporter lists. According to her, largely due to online ads, Obama managed to get a significant number of small donations. (Kaye 2008, n.pag.) This is an example of the importance of online campaigning nowadays and its power to raise funds. In the current study, the candidates' blogs very frequently included calls for donations, and so it can be said that the Internet has secured itself as a highly useful tool for raising funds for campaigns.

However, Kaye points out that during the 2008 election, spending on Internet advertising was still quite small, and points to the big difference that still exists between spending on TV advertising and advertising online. She claims that Internet advertising is seen as an unpersuasive medium and that it is mainly seen as a tool for gathering donations. (Kaye 2008, n.pag.) However, it has to be said that Kaye wrote her article in 2008, so the importance placed on the Internet in the campaign cycle of 2012 is probably much higher. Kaye does account for the possible change in the future, as she mentions for example the campaigns' use of YouTube videos to induce voters in 2008. Cassino (cited in Kaye 2008, n.pag) states that the 2008 election was a game-changing one in terms of digital marketing. (Kaye 2008, n.pag.) Overall, the Internet played a role in the 2008 presidential election and was bound to increase in significance for the 2012 election.

Simendinger (2008, n.pag) also talks about the transformative nature of the 2008 presidential election campaign. She describes how new techniques were used to advertise the candidates; she for example describes Obama's television advert during a Super Bowl broadcast in which he was surrounded by crowds of supporters and then "Text HOPE to 62262" appeared as a call for donations. This type of advertising had not been done before and it is seen as a transformative point in election campaigning. (Simendinger 2008, n.pag.) Jamieson (interviewed for Simendinger 2008, n.pag) points out that this move combined the passive TV medium with an interactive element, a call to action. Jamieson goes on to state that this new type of "political message delivery" is going to outlive the 2008 election (interviewed for Simendinger 2008, n.pag). I would argue that the use of blogs is also a type of political message delivery system, which has become a significant part of election campaigning.

Simendinger (2008, n.pag) also points out that this kind of a new tactic used in Obama's campaign has the advantage of being outside of the "news media filter", which is a typical goal for campaign advertising. The blogs on the websites of the candidates in the 2012 election are also outside of the news media filter as the campaign teams themselves write

them according to their own plans and aims. Simendinger (2008, n.pag) mentions the difficulty of evaluating whether Obama's use of new messaging tools was gaining him an actual advantage in the 2008 election, but that this issue has attracted much scholarly interest. Thus, this kind of use of new devices was of scholarly interest also during the 2008 election, and as the use of ever-newer tools increases, it remains an important and interesting research topic. However, Simendinger (2008, n.pag) maintains that political scientists have not reached a consensus on whether this use of new media can have new political results.

However, for instance Miller (2008) is among those who credit Web 2.0 for major influence on campaigning by maintaining that through the use of these Web 2.0 tools, "Mr. Obama's campaign changed the way politicians organize supporters, advertise to voters, defend against attacks and communicate with constituencies" (Miller 2008 n.pag). Particularly relevant to the present study is the defending against attacks that is made easy by having a blog on the campaign website, for example.

Simendinger (2008, n.pag) mentions that the new media approaches that Obama used during the 2008 election came naturally to him and also were suitable for his typical supporters who were mainly "young, educated, and tech-savvy upper-income". Jamieson (cited in Simendinger 2008, n.pag) points out that the mere fact of using this new media is not enough for it to work. She compares Obama and Hillary Clinton who were competing for the Democratic Party's nomination in 2008. She maintains that these two candidates had different audiences and that Clinton's audience was not as natural with new media as was Obama's. (Jamieson, cited in Simendinger 2008, n.pag.) Following this line of thinking, it could be said that also during the 2012 election, Obama's audience was more attuned to new media than Romney's and this must have had an effect on their campaigning. Simendinger (2008, n.pag) also points out that in 2008 every candidate knew that they must have a website to present themselves. Thus, having a website has become a self-evident fact for candidates, and the work that the campaigns put into them has undoubtedly increased during the years. Simendinger (2008, n.pag) maintains that the Internet is becoming an increasingly important source for political news. Not surprisingly, the people who most frequently use the Internet to get campaign news are young people, but also the percentage of older people using the Internet has been rising in the recent past. (Simendinger 2008, n.pag.)

As I have already pointed out, and as Hendricks and Denton, Jr. (2010: xi) also mention, the presidential election in 2008 was the first nation-wide campaign in which the Internet and new media technology dominated over the more traditional media, such as newspapers and television. This election year was transformative in the sense that it was the

first time that candidates used new media in such a great amount and so effectively, although this was not the first time that candidates had used this new media, as I have described previously. (Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: xi.) Hendricks and Denton, Jr. state that the Internet and new media technologies are going to be a big influence in all future campaigns during the twenty-first century, which was confirmed by the 2008 campaign of Obama. (Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: xii-xiii.) Attesting to this statement is also the reference by Wattal et al. (2010: 669-670) to a report by the Pew Institute that indicates that during the 2008 American presidential election, over 55% of adults used the Internet to find information and news related to the election as well as to participate in political dialogue. Todd and Gawiser (2009: 30-31, cited in Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 7) also state that in the 2008 election, Obama's aim in using the Internet was to motivate both new and young voters and his campaign was very successful in achieving this goal. According to them, 66% of young voters (under thirty) and 69% of new voters were supporters of Obama (Todd and Gawiser 2009: 30-31, cited in Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 7).

Denton, Jr. and Kuypers (2008: 4-5) point out that in all its different manifestations, politics takes place, materializes through communication. Hendricks and Denton, Jr. (2010: 3) also talk about how the new media with its technologies help to increase "citizen issue understanding and political engagement". Additionally, the new technologies can move beyond the limitations of time and space that are linked to traditional media. (Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 3.) Winograd and Hais (2008: 1, 155, cited in Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 6) also claim that there are both technological and generational transitions going on presently in terms of the rapidly evolving new technologies and the importance of the generation that uses these new media constantly. This will, according to them, lead to a "civic realignment" that will be more favorable to the Democratic Party. Winograd and Hais maintain that the presidential election of 2008 was a sign of this realignment. They also point out that the new Millennial generation (i.e. people born between 1978 and 1996 (Miller 2013: 334)) is more inclined to support the Democratic Party by their nature. (Winograd and Hais 2008, cited in Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 6-7.) All in all, it seems that at the moment, the Democrats are benefiting most about the introduction of new media technologies, and perhaps this was also visible in the 2012 election.

Wolff (2003, cited in Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 7) calls the Internet the new mass medium. Talking about the advantages of using the Internet for campaigning, Gulati (2010, cited in Hendricks and Denton, Jr. 2010: 7) states that "Today, the World Wide Web is the single best medium for allowing candidates to communicate directly, without any filter, to

a multitude of constituencies simultaneously while maintaining a great deal of control over their own message". Exactly the control that the candidates can have on what they say and how they say it is one of the most important advantages of using the Internet for campaigning for the candidates, and in this way, Internet campaigning differs greatly from campaigning through traditional media such as newspapers or television.

Nowadays many people are very used to the idea of blogs and at least for many young people, blogs can be even a daily source of information, entertainment, and socializing. Choosing to use blogs on the campaign websites can also be linked to the understanding that blogs are so common today and that it is becoming a natural part of the Internet. *Technocrati*, a social media tracking company, made an estimate in their *State of the Blogosphere 2008* report (2009) that 133 million people worldwide had a blog (cited in Macnamara 2010: 240), however not including the majority of the 182 million blogs tracked in China, an estimate by the China Internet Network Information Center. Thus, blogs are a prominent part of the Internet today, and therefore, it is only natural that the presidential candidates would include one on their campaign websites. Young people in particular are used to blogs and blogging, and naturally young voters are very important for the candidates and therefore, communicating in ways that they are familiar with is a good policy. Miller (2013: 334) points out how the Millennial generation are traditionally seen as politically inactive. However, Sanson (2008: 163, 170) posits that due to this generation's size (82 million people), this part of the electorate has very strong voting power, and states that a poll in 2008 (Rock the Vote) found that 80% of 18-30-year-olds were following the election and 88% of them maintained that young people have the power for issue a change in the United States. Obama's campaign in 2008 made it easy for this generation to participate by using new media so effectively and thus the campaign succeeded in reaching the youth vote to such a great extent (Miller 2013: 335; Norquay 2008: 60). However, Miller raises an interesting issue with the rising use of new media and technology in campaigning, as while young voters are being addressed as never before, the danger is that older voters, who are not equally familiar with new media as the majority of young people, are not being reached (2013: 336).

All in all, during the past few elections, the Internet has cemented its position as a medium for campaigning for candidates in elections, and one that all candidates have embraced. Even though there is a consensus in the field that the Internet can be effectively used in fundraising purposes, for instance, it is not agreed how much influence the websites of candidates, for example, can have on the end result of a campaign. Along with candidate

websites, blogs have firmly taken their place in campaigning and have brought a new kind of link between the candidates and the electorate.

2.2 Negativity in political communication

Lilleker (2006: 127) defines negativity in political communication as "a tool of communication that stresses the weaknesses in the opponents' arguments, behavior, personality or credentials for government". He continues to say that negativity is "linked to making attacks on electoral opponents, thus undermining the candidate or party, suggesting that the sponsor of the attack could do better" (Lilleker 2006: 127). According to him, negativity is for the most part studied as a feature in political advertising. Lilleker notes that negativity has been used in political campaigning for a long time, but that it is new to have very systematic use of negativity in a democratic context, and that this kind of use has its origins in the United States. (Lilleker 2006: 127.)

According to Lilleker (2006: 128), the key feature of negativity in campaigning is that the theme of the particular aspect of the campaign, an advert for example, is focused on launching an attack against the opponent and not on creating a positive image for the sponsor of the message him/herself. Moreover, he maintains that negativity is more memorable than the more appropriate method of candidates emphasizing their virtues. Negative adverts are more eye-catching, and that is naturally a beneficial thing in campaigning. (Lilleker 2006: 128.) Ansolabehere and Iyengar note that the public often sees negativity in campaigning as "dirty tricks", and they note that negative messages basically solely appeal to those voters who already support the sponsor candidate (1995, cited in Lilleker 2006: 130).

Lilleker (2006: 147) also gives a definition for political advertising. He says that "a political advertisement is a purposely placed piece of communication, using a range of media, designed to garner positive feelings towards the sponsor" (Lilleker 2006: 147). He makes a division between three types of political advertising, and they are: advocacy, comparative, and negative. He explains that in the beginning of political advertising, advocacy was the main type used. However, when mere advocacy was not working anymore, negativity and attacks started to come to the fore. This resulted in comparative ads in which both candidates were discussed, and naturally, the sponsor was shown in a favorable light. The focus of negative ads is basically completely on the opposing candidate. He mentions that political advertising employs all kinds of media. According to him, in the US, the most common

medium for political advertising is television spots. (Lilleker 2006: 147-148.) However, blogs can also be seen as a medium for political advertising. As in other types of advertising, in blogs the candidates can present themselves in the way they want and also describe the opponent how they wish. In addition, following Lilleker's definition of political advertising, a blog post is also a "purposefully placed piece of communication -- designed to garner positive feelings towards the sponsor". Additionally, Coleman (2005: 276) maintains that blogs are employed as tools of self-presentation, and which, in the case of political blogs, Vesnic-Alujevic (2011: 416) posits to be tools of political advertising.

Overall, as Lilleker (2006: 149) points out, political advertising takes advantage of negativity increasingly much. Obviously, this has to be accompanied by positive information and messages about the sponsor candidate. Negative advertisements still draw more interest than positive ones and, some argue, have more impact. Nevertheless, negativity can turn people away from politics and thus have counter-productive implications. Lilleker also notes that a large amount of the content of political advertising is often actually nonfactual. (Lilleker 2006: 149)

Geer (2006) has also studied different kinds of appeals in his work. His data were television adverts in campaigns ranging across the 20th century. He has defined negativity very clearly, and his definition is also suitable for my thesis. Geer (2006: 23) defines negativity as "any criticism leveled by one candidate against another during a campaign". According to him there is absolutely no "grey area" in this definition. In a campaign, an appeal either creates doubt about the opposition or shows why the sponsor candidate is worth voting for. The appeal is thus either negative or positive, and there is no middle ground. He states that his definition does not say whether the criticism is about the traits or the policies, for instance, but that absolutely any type of criticism counts as negativity. (Geer 2006: 23.) In his work, Geer studies appeals in adverts and analyzes whether they are positive or negative (2006: 30-31).

Geer (2006: 24) acknowledges the fact that various scholars have talked against employing the term 'negativity' because it denotes too much 'dirty politics' and thus is tainted (e.g. Jamieson, cited in Bartels et al. 1998: 17). Nevertheless, Geer considers it justified to use the term 'negativity', and that to use it is much better than for every scholar to use their own terms and thus merely complicate the issue. (Geer 2006: 24.) I agree with this rationale and will use the term 'negativity', as well. Another important point that Geer (2006: 33) mentions is that the instances of negativity that he chooses for his analysis are explicitly negative and that plenty of implicit negativity, so to speak, is left out. Mendelberg (2001,

cited in Geer 2006: 33) has discussed the weight of implicit appeals in political campaigns. Mendeleberg's (2001) focus is however on implicit racial appeals and their use in campaigns in the United States. It is certainly true that much is said indirectly and between the lines, but in the current study, I will concentrate on the clear, explicit negative appeals in the blogs, and exclude the analysis of implicatures, and I, like Geer (2006: 33), must acknowledge the weakness that comes from leaving the implicit negative appeals outside of the analysis. In a larger study it would be interesting to analyze also the implicit cases of negativity, because it is true that they are very often used and are maybe even more effective than the "in-your-face" negative references. However, in this current study, it is not feasible to study the implicatures in addition to the explicit cases because of limited space and the consequentially restricted research focus.

2.3 The image of a candidate

Patterson (1980) discusses the effects of mass media on elections from various points of view. He studied the impressions and views of voters during a presidential race in the United States and especially the changes in their views that occurred as the race moved from primary season to the general election period and to analyze what the effect of the media was on their views. His focus was on the 1976 election and his method was conducting a panel survey of voters. (Patterson 1980: Vii-viii.)

Patterson discusses the issue of the image of a candidate, and the findings that he gathered have relevance also for my study. The focus of my study is on the negative images that the candidates try to create for one another in their blogs and thus, image creation is a key issue at play. Patterson's study of how the voters' views of candidates are born and change during the election because of the mass media can give some insight into the possibility of blogs and the attacks in them to have any influence on voters' attitudes towards the candidates. In my data, the blog texts try to have an impact on the voters' views of their opponent and thus try to mold their image.

Boulding (1956, cited in Patterson 1980: 133) states that "a candidate's image consists of the subjective impressions that voters have of him". He continues to state that these impressions come in many forms. They can be thoughts about the campaign success of the candidate, his or her political values, personality, and leadership, for instance. (Boulding 1956, cited in Patterson 1980: 133.) Patterson points out that many of the impressions come

through the media, such as newspapers and television. What he tries to find out in his study is whether these images differ in terms of from which medium they derive. However, it is not to be expected that the voters' images of the candidates emanate only from exposure to election messages that they see in the media. (Patterson 1980: 133-134.) Patterson (1980: 134) tries to uncover how partisanship, in other words, affiliation to one of the two parties, affects the images and impressions that voters develop. In a country where there are basically only two political parties, it can be said that partisanship is often very high. Moreover, another interesting issue that Patterson studies is whether the voters in a way see what they want to see in the candidates (Patterson 1980: 134). Thus, can newspapers or television, or in the current study, campaign blogs, have any effect on voters' feelings about the candidates once they have made up their minds about them? However, the approach of this study will not allow for an analysis of how the voters actually perceived the two candidates during the 2012 election or how their views developed. I must simply concentrate on the content of the blogs and the attempts to influence voters' views of the opponent.

In his study of the 1976 presidential election, Patterson discusses the different kinds of impressions that the voters had about the candidates. He divides these impressions into two categories: stylistic and political. Impressions that he defines as stylistic are about the candidate's personality, his or her campaign performance and personal background, whereas political impressions are about the candidate's leadership abilities, governing capabilities and actions, policy actions, issue positions, policies, and political values. (Patterson 1980: 134-135, 147.) These are impressions that I also study in my work, although I use these types of strategies in a different way and concentrate on the attacks that target these characteristics.

Patterson (1980: 135) points out that once the candidate's image is formed, it is unlikely to be changed by new information to any serious degree. In addition, once the voters have in their minds stereotyped the candidates, it is quite typical that they project this image of them into everything they see or hear about them during the campaign (Patterson 1980: 135). Following this notion, it is unlikely that the blog posts in the campaign websites are going to change Obama supporters' perhaps negative views of Romney and vice versa. However, I would suspect that the demographic that they *can* influence is those who are still undecided. This group of undecideds are a very contested demographic in an election, since they are very much in a deciding role come Election Day.

Patterson (1980: 142) goes on to explain that the extent to which news messages can change the direction of a candidate's image depends on the degree to which the candidate's image was formed before the campaign. In addition, in an election between an incumbent and

a challenger candidate, voters automatically have a more clearly formed view of the incumbent than the challenger since they have followed his or her actions during the first term already (Patterson 1980: 142). In the 2012 election, Obama's image was definitely more defined in people's minds than the image of Romney from the onset. Patterson wrote his book in 1980 when newspapers and television truly were the central media in campaign coverage, but nowadays, the prominence of the Internet has brought a whole new platform to campaigns. The blogs on the candidate websites are trying to form a positive image for the sponsoring candidate and a negative one for the opponent, and this is done through words, although pictures and videos are also posted. As I have mentioned earlier, due to limited space, I will stay on the level of words in this study.

Patterson goes on to say that the voters' perceptions of candidates do not depend only on the messages that they receive through the media. Often they are loyal to one political party or another; in other words, when they see coverage on the candidates, they have a biased view of them and often view them selectively. (Patterson 1980: 146.) Regarding his study, Patterson points out that in the primary period, before the national conventions of each party, where the eventual candidate is chosen, voters could form quite positive images of candidates beyond party lines. However, Patterson found that later in the game, during the general election period, partisanship and the impressions that come with that often could become stronger and more prominent, but still, the earlier, initial positive impressions beyond party affiliations were competing against the later ones. (Patterson 1980: 147, 150.)

Patterson (1980: 150) noted that the voters' impressions about the candidates had a tendency to last all through the campaign. He found that in a majority of the cases (80%), the impressions that voters had of the candidates during the general election period were linked more to their earlier impressions from the primary season than to their party affiliations. Patterson asserts that party loyalty does not undermine early images of the candidates in the minds of the voters, but instead, competes with them for impact on later images. (Patterson 1980: 150, 152.)

Trent and Friedenberg (2000) also discuss the process of how the image of a candidate is constructed in the minds of voters. They point out that voters have some preconceived notions of what an ideal candidate should be like or how he or she should behave, and this is constantly compared with the way the candidate actually does act during the campaign. Thus, the voters are continuously combing through different, often contradictory information while making sense of the campaign for themselves. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 67.) This kind of existence of contradictory information that the voters receive can also be seen in my data.

Both Obama and Romney are claiming that the other side is spreading false information about them and are thus accusing them of lying. Thus, not only do voters build images of candidates in their minds by comparing the sometimes very contradictory information they see and hear about them continually during the campaign period, but they also compare the image of a specific candidate in their minds to an idealized, preconceived version of a candidate that they have in their head.

2.4 Previous research on using negativity in campaigning and on the use of blogs in campaigning

Some research has been done on the use of blogs in electoral campaigns in the past. As the whole concept of the blog is so recent, most of the studies conveyed on the subject are from the past decade or so, however constantly increasing in number. However, it seems that a lot of the research that has been done on blogs in political campaigns is actually about blogs that are not the candidates', but instead are political blogs that comment on and discuss the campaigns and the election. Nevertheless, some studies have been conducted on the use of blogs as tools in campaigning and my research will contribute to that body.

Campbell (2009: 139) has studied the influence that political blogs have had on politics in the United States and the rhetoric of these blogs. His aim was to analyze through three different real events, which were said to have been influenced by blogs, the actual impact that the blogs had in these situations. He used political science approaches to re-examine the situations to discover the influence of blogs. His key finding from the study was that the idea that political blogs, as a "progressive new force", can have a strong impact on the success or failure of a politician is too optimistic and simplistic of a notion. (Campbell 2009: 139.)

Campbell (2009: 140) points out that there is, in fact, a vast amount of literature on blogs in the context of American politics. He suggests that the majority of research done on the subject of political blogs insist on the notion that blogs have an important role to play in today's American politics. He notes that a lot of the research and commentary on blogs that maintain their significant influence on politics justify these claims by giving examples of political events that were related to blogs. Campbell, however, has a more critical view of blogs and their alleged influence on political events. His aim was to critically study his three chosen events and he tried to see whether the blogs were in fact such an important influence

on them. (Campbell 2009: 140.) One of the occasions that he examined is the campaign of Howard Dean in the American presidential primary race during the period 2003-2004. Dean utilized his blog very successfully as a fundraising tool. (Campbell 2009: 141.)

Campbell notes that Dean's blog was probably mostly meant for people who were already his active supporters, but the use of this new medium turned many supporters into donors and volunteers, for instance. Thus, the blog did have a great influence on his campaign, although, in the end, Dean did not get even close to winning the Democratic Party's nomination. (Campbell 2009: 145-146.) Against this background, it might be suggested that possibly the blogs on Obama's and Romney's websites are also most efficient in turning existing supporters into active volunteers and donors. The fundraising section on both candidates' websites is featured very prominently, so one of the key functions of the sites is in fact fundraising. More specifically, the pleas for donations were often present in the blog posts. Thus, it could be argued that Dean was in a way the pioneer in using his website and the blog on it to raise funds for an electoral campaign. Nevertheless, in the present study, the pleas in the blogs for fundraising are not the focus since they are not explicit negativity against the opponent.

Campbell (2009: 146-147) also cites information provided by Rainie et al. (2005: ii) according to which about 63 million people in the United States were looking for campaign news in 2004 on the Internet and 13 million people were involved in campaigning activities. However, despite these figures, Rainie et al. (2005: 3) found that approximately 95% of these people were "hardly ever" turning to blogs to get election information.

Moreover, Campbell notes that in the Dean campaign, the blog was used to create a sense of belonging among the supporters and a feeling that the campaign was directly in contact with them. This was achieved, for instance, by including posts by Dean himself and by the campaign staff. The end result was a strong feeling of interaction. (Stromer-Galley and Baker 2006: 123, 128, cited in Campbell 2009: 147.) A sense of communication like this between voters and the campaign staff and the candidates themselves is also apparent in Obama's and Romney's blogs. I found their blogs to be very clearly in connection to the voters and I would suggest that this is a good strategy as it includes the voters in the campaign. This kind of a strategy of interaction and inclusion can also be used to create a negative image of the opposing candidate as the supporters can be rallied together by showing how their benefits are in danger if the other candidate is elected, and after illustrating this, the supporters are asked to step up and help the campaign by donating money or by going around from door to door to recruit other supporters, for instance. Moreover, in both Obama's and

Romney's blogs, there were posts that, at least supposedly, were written by the candidates themselves, which were no doubt trying to build a sense of direct interaction between the candidate and the voter.

Campbell states that Dean was a pioneer in using the blog as a campaign tool, but that in 2009, when he wrote his article, blogs were implemented as regular features in campaigns and that they are now "politics as usual" (Margolis and Resnick 2000, cited in Campbell 2009: 147-148). Therefore, in 2012, the blog had established its status as an integral part of a presidential election and this is also one reason for examining the use of blogs, since they have such an important role to play. For example, Burstein (2005: xxv) is of the opinion that blogs have the most influence in an election that is very tight. He says that the blog's influence is marginal, though important, but that in an election where the marginal is crucial as it is so close, the blog becomes very influential (Burstein 2005: xxv). Souley and Wicks (2005: 538) also maintain that in a situation where the race is tight, candidates usually go on the offensive. The race between Obama and Romney was also rather tight, so perhaps it could be assumed, if we follow the view of Burstein and others, that the blogs were in an influential position in 2012, as well. Campbell's conclusion is that the blogs' actual influence on political events is debatable. However, he acknowledges that blogs have recently truly become a "new platform for political communication" in the United States. (Campbell 2009: 151.)

Another scholar who has studied the use of blogs in presidential elections is Sweetser Trammell (2007). More specifically, she investigated the American presidential election in 2004 in which George W. Bush and John Kerry were competing against each other. Her specific aim was to analyze how the blogs were targeting young people. (Sweetser Trammell 2007: 1255.) She notes that the use of the Internet as a cheaper medium has increased lately as traditional broadcast news give less time for candidates (Lichter et al. 1999 and Tedesco 2004, cited in Sweetser Trammell 2007: 1255). Sweetser Trammell points out that the huge advantage of using the Internet in campaigns is the fact that it provides an easy way to deliver an unlimited number of messages to different target groups. She also notes that campaigns are likely to use the Internet to reach especially young voters, as it has been observed that young people use the Internet in ever increasing numbers. (Sweetser Trammell 2007: 1255; Pew Internet and American Life Project 2005, cited in Sweetser Trammell 2007: 1255.)

The aim of Sweetser Trammell's study was to analyze the use of blogs by the two presidential candidates in the 2004 race and specifically the focus that the blogs had on targeting young voters, and the method used was content analysis. (Sweetser Trammell 2007:

1256.) One of the main objectives of Sweetser Trammell's study was to find out how often the campaign blogs addressed young people and which campaign did it more (Sweetser Trammell 2007: 1256). In her study, the blog post was the unit of analysis. Sweetser Trammell identified the blog posts that targeted young people in three ways: by looking for use of certain keywords, checking whether they had been written by students, or searching for the inclusion of "youth issues" in the posts. (Sweetser Trammell 2007: 1257.)

Sweetser Trammell analyzed the appeal strategies that the politicians used in their blogs when targeting young people. She found out that the most used one was an attack against the opposing candidate. (Sweetser Trammell 2007: 1259.) This interestingly illustrates the perceived impact of going negative, since this strategy was used the most. Thus, in my research, I will also in a way study an appeal strategy used by the two candidates, since I will focus on the creation of negative images of the opposing candidates. However, I will not employ the term 'appeal', but instead I will identify different strategies used to create this negative image. I will draw from the research by Trent and Friedenberg and their use of campaign communication strategies, which I will present fully in chapter 3.4.2.

Vesnic-Alujevic (2011: 414) discusses how the role and significance of the Internet is seen in the field of political communication. It is for the most part agreed that the Internet has the possibility to be a powerful medium in political communication (Anstead and Chadwick 2009, cited in Vesnic-Alujevic 2011: 414). Yet there is a division between those who are so called "cyber-optimists" who welcome the lack of a middle-man between the politicians and the citizens and the consequent increased participation that comes about with the use of the Internet, and "cyber-pessimists" who do not see such great increases in the level of participation (Vedel 2003 and Sunstein 2007, cited in Vesnic-Alujevic 2011: 414). Some cyber-pessimists think that the Internet is not an effective tool for mobilizing new supporters (e.g. Bimber and Davis 2003 and Norris 2001, cited in Vesnic-Alujevic 2011: 414) and that the Internet does not increase political participation as it is natural for people to avoid ideas that they do not agree with (e.g. Sunstein 2007, cited in Vesnic-Alujevic 2011: 414). Vesnic-Alujevic herself acknowledges that there is a possibility for increased inclusion in political participation, but that it should be viewed with caution, as it can be excessively idealistic (Vesnic-Alujevic 2011: 414). Perhaps it is also true in relation to Obama and Romney's websites and further, their blogs, that they are mostly frequented by people who already are supporters of the sponsor candidate, and thus, the expected percentage of people who come to the sites as supporters of the opposing candidate is very low. However, the sites and blogs may be highly influential with regards to people who are yet undecided.

Vesnic-Alujevic's focus is on the European Parliament elections in 2009. Her aim was to analyze how the incumbent Members of the European Parliament utilize blogs, and through this analysis she wanted to find out what their campaign strategy was like and what kinds of dominant discourses were revealed. (Vesnic-Alujevic 2011: 413-414.) Vesnic-Alujevic (2011: 415) describes blogs as a genre that can be thought of both as a political and a media discourse genre. Galita (2009, cited in Vesnic-Alujevic 2011: 415) states that messages in political discourse have the intention to influence the attitudes and beliefs of the public and also to persuade. Thus, it can be said that also the blogs that I will analyze naturally incorporate political discourse messages, and the aim of some of the posts is to create a negative image of the opponent and thus have an impact on the audience's view of and attitude towards that candidate. Vesnic-Alujevic (2011: 415) notes how language and rhetoric are important factors in political advertising and communication, in addition to the content related to ideology or program. She also refers to Trent and Friedenberg's (2003) subcategories related to rhetoric, some of which are also used in my research, such as attacking the opponent's record or attacking the opponent's personality (Vesnic-Alujevic 2011: 415). Perhaps the most effective rhetorical tool in political campaigning has been defined as the emotional one, and plenty of research has been conducted on it. (Vesnic-Alujevic 2011: 415-416.)

Momoc (2011) has studied the creation of negative images of opposite candidates in elections by utilizing the blog, and his focus was on the use of blogs during the 2009 presidential elections in Romania. He wanted to find out whether the politicians wanted to create a specific kind of image of themselves and whether they strived to build a negative image of the opposing candidates (Momoc 2011: 11). Momoc states that the blog is unpaid publicity and a free form of media that politicians use to influence the traditional mass media agenda (Momoc 2011: 12). However, this kind of description does not equally well fit the candidates and their blogs targeted in my research. The candidates in the American presidential race have massive investments in mass media advertising as part of their campaigns, and therefore their blogs are not used to influence the mass media agenda in the way that Momoc suggests. In addition, Momoc (2011: 13) discusses online PR which he defines as the use of "the email, blog, website, video-sharing channels, user generated content websites (YouTube) and social networks". These are ways through which politicians can avoid the influence of, for example, journalists when they want to promote a certain kind of image of themselves. In Momoc's research, the overall aim was to look at the image that the candidates wanted to promote by using their blogs. (2011: 12-13.) The benefit that the

candidates also in my study get from utilizing blogs is that they can themselves, unaffected, decide what to publish and in what form. This is a huge advantage compared to traditional forms of publicity such as newspapers or television programs that discuss the candidates. In those cases, the candidates cannot monitor how they are being represented and what is being said about them. The blogs give the candidates free hands to say what they want, how they want it, about themselves and, even more importantly, about their opposing candidate.

In his study, Momoc used two different methods. Firstly, he analyzed the content of the blog posts to find out whether they were used to mobilize electors or to attack competitors, for instance. Secondly, he used image analysis through which he wanted to find out what kinds of images the politicians present of themselves in their blogs; for example whether the image is personal, professional, or political. (Momoc 2011: 14.) Momoc (2011: 16) defines image analysis as studying the image that the politician wanted to show to the public. Through image analysis, he wanted to analyze what kind of an image the politicians wanted to create for themselves and not how the image was perceived by the public that read the blogs (Momoc 2011: 15). In the present study as well, the focus is on identifying the ways of creating a negative image for the opponent and not on audience perception of the blogs.

Momoc found that the blog posts that he analyzed mostly promoted the political dimension of the politician's image and, contrary to his initial hypothesis, attacked the opposing candidates quite infrequently. He also found that the candidates' attitudes were mostly positive in the blogs, and promoting their own messages and themes was more prominent than attacking the opposing candidates. (2011: 18-19.)

Klotz (1998) studied the use of negative advertising on the Internet in the U.S. senate races of 1996. He explains the typology that is used to characterize negative advertising. The typical distinction in the field is made between purely oppositional advertising and comparative advertising that refers to both candidates. Klotz however finds it useful to make an additional distinction between engagingly comparative and superficially comparative forms, the former of which is the stronger and the latter the weaker version. His focus is on the rhetoric of negative campaigning, and in his view, these distinctions help to see that negative campaigning varies greatly among candidates and their campaigning techniques. (Klotz 1998: 347.)

Klotz (1998: 348) defines negative campaigning as "discussing the opposing candidate with the intention of putting that person in an unfavorable light". This definition is at the core of my research question, as I will study how the candidates' blogs create a negative image of the opponent. Klotz (1998: 348) explains that the need for negative campaigning has

been acknowledged since the times of Aristotle and the first studies of rhetoric. Moreover, Klotz points out that the limits of negativism have also always been discussed. It was understood by the first ancient scholars that negative remarks about individuals should not be overpowering, and that there should exist limits. (Klotz 1998: 348.) Trent and Friedenberg (2000: 100-101) also mention in their discussion of campaign strategies that attacking the opponent directly by the candidate is usually not considered tasteful, and that the other members of the campaign staff should rather engage in more direct attacks.

In his study, Klotz (1998: 349) looks at the frequency of negative advertising online, who uses it, when it is used, what the focus of it is, and what the rhetorical character of it is. For the purposes of my study, the most relevant of these are the last two: the focus of the negative advertising and its rhetorical character. Klotz explains that scholars usually differentiate between negative campaigning that is focused on either political or personal characteristics of the opposing candidate (1998: 350). West (1993, cited in Klotz 1998: 350) found that in television advertisements, negativity is most often linked to political performance or issue stances. This emphasis on the political persona of the opponent is also apparent in my data of blog posts.

Klotz (1998: 351) draws from Jamieson's theory of dividing the negative ads into oppositional, self-promotional, and engaged ones. Of these, the engaged ad is essentially the one that compares the candidates. (Jamieson 1992: 270, cited in Klotz 1998: 351.) However, Klotz makes a more detailed distinction as he uses the terms "superficially comparative ad" and "engagingly comparative ad" when discussing comparative ads. The strong version, engagingly comparative ad, takes advantage of data to assert the strength of the sponsor candidate. The weak version, the superficially comparative ad, discusses both candidates, but not in specific terms. (Klotz 1998: 351.)

Klotz (1998: 352) also makes the assumption that challenger candidates will most probably take advantage of negative campaigning more than incumbents, which is overwhelmingly true also of my data. Klotz (1998: 349-350) refers to a study by Goldenberg and Traugott (1984) that found that print material used by challenger candidates was by far more negative than the incumbent candidate's. This notion of incumbents usually having more positive campaigns, which Klotz points out has been noticed by many studies (Klotz 1998: 349-350), also holds true concerning the presidential race that I analyze. In addition, the model outlined by Trent and Friedenberg, which I will employ to a certain extent, reflects this view. This kind of distribution of negative advertising is also very logical in my opinion. Another prediction that Klotz makes is that the focus of negative campaigning on political

rather than personal issues should also be true of Internet campaigning as well as other media (1998: 352). This division of emphasis can also be seen in my data. Naturally, this is very logical as the candidates try to convince the public that the other candidate is not suitable for the post of president and so targeting their political characteristics and views is very effective to achieve this goal.

In his study, Klotz proceeds by first searching the candidate websites for mentions of the opponent and then for instances of negative campaigning. Thus, the units of analysis are the paragraphs where negative advertising can be seen. (Klotz 1998: 352-353.) Klotz (1998: 353-354) found that it was quite easy to identify negative advertising, as nearly always when the opponent was mentioned, the purpose was to show him or her in a bad light. I have also noticed this tendency in my data. The other candidate is rarely, if ever, mentioned in another way than negative. Overall, Klotz found that the frequency of negative advertising online was low (Klotz 1998: 354). However, his study was done nearly two decades ago, and the amount of negativity has soared significantly (see e.g. Geer 2012). Another finding of Klotz was that the focus of negative campaigning was on issue stances rather than on personal characteristics (1998: 356).

As I have mentioned previously, Geer (2006) also has defined negativity in political campaigning, and more specifically, he discusses negativity in presidential election campaigns in his book. He argues that negative issue appeals and attacks in campaign ads serve an important function, and rather than being harmful to the election process, as some insist, they can provide important information about the contending candidates to the voting public. Geer maintains that negative appeals give more information to voters and deal more with issues than positive or purely self-promotional appeals, and the reason for this is that the negative appeals need evidence to back them up. He says that negative attacks cannot be created from thin air; instead there needs to be a solid basis for them as they are presented to the public. Thus, the negative appeals have to have some informative background and in this way they enrich the electoral process. (Geer 2006: 85-87, 93-95.) He says that candidates cannot invent issues that they attack on, since they follow a "trail of evidence" which in turn has an effect on what issues are attacked. This is truer of negative appeals than positive appeals. (Geer 2006: 94.) Greenberg (2009: 74) also points out how negativity in campaigning can have important functions in raising awareness about certain issues, for instance. Voters end up learning about the candidates while they attack one another. (Greenberg 2009: 74.)

Geer also talks about the difference between the party in power and the party not in power and their candidates. He states that the "out-party" or challenger uses the incumbent's record in his or her attacks to get elected. He argues that in order to have accountable democratic parties and government, the out-party has an important role in being the critic of the party that is in power. (Geer 2006: 95.) Thus, it can be said that it is in a way the challenger's task to be very critical of the incumbent in his or her attacks. He also mentions that typically, negativity is viewed in an unfavorable light, which he thinks is not justified, as it is very much the out-party's duty to be critical of the party in control (Geer 2006: 109-110).

Moreover, Geer (2006: 97) points out that the challengers tend to be more responsive to public opinion than the incumbents, and he found that if a problem is identified by the citizens, it is very likely to appear in the attacks that the challenger launches against the incumbent. He maintains that negative appeals are not about issues that are not relevant and they are not meant to distract or mislead the public, but instead are about issues that the public sees as important and that are genuine problems for the government; in other words, issues that arise from the specific context and specific moment the election is played in (Geer 2006: 87, 99, 109). This may be true to a great extent but I would still argue that negative attacks can often exaggerate the problem and maybe even in some cases mislead the voters to believe something about the opponent that is not strictly speaking true. That is why both sides in the election that I am focusing on have sections in their blogs where they dispute the "facts" that the other side has said about them. Obama's campaign, for example, had a "Truth Team" whose task was to refute claims that Romney's team had launched against him.

Geer elaborates on the concept of specificity more and says that candidates want to be specific when they are targeting the opponent's views, not ambiguous. In their attacks, candidates want to show the flaws in the opponent's plans and the risk in choosing this candidate. (Geer 2006: 104.) Following Geer's perception that negative appeals are often more specific than positive ones and thus have more informative quality for voters, I think that studying negativity in campaigns is most definitely worthwhile. Voters can get important information about the candidates in the contest from attacks and other negative appeals, more so than positive appeals. (Geer 2006: 105, 109.) Geer found that only a small percentage of positive appeals included information specific enough to be useful for voters when trying to differentiate between candidates (2006: 105). It is another matter whether the voters are receptive to these negative claims and their information about their preferred candidates or not, but again, perhaps this holds more true with undecided voters.

Furthermore, Geer makes the important point that the impression that the voters have of a candidate's view on an issue is not only created by what the candidate himself or herself says but also by what the opponent says (Geer 2006: 106). This idea is very central to my study as well. Geer continues to say that often scholars have viewed the gap between what the candidates say about themselves and what the public sees to result from misunderstanding or ignorance of the public. He argues that the case may actually be that the opponent's statements have just been ignored. (Geer 2006: 106.) This notion is related to my research, as I think that studying how the candidates create a negative image of each other is useful to get a clearer picture of campaigning. By taking into account the opponent's statements about the other candidate, a fuller understanding can be reached about all the ways in which the public creates their perceptions of candidates in elections.

Geer maintains that attacks from the opposition are more likely to have an impact on the voters as they are making their decision on whom to vote for. He goes on to say that the challenger's attacks against the incumbent are significant in that they highlight the problems of the incumbent to the public and thus help improve the accountability of the political process. All of this is related to the performance of democratic functions of elections, in which the challenger's messages to the voters are very crucial. (Geer 2006: 110.) A multitude of studies in the field refer to Geer's work and use his definitions (see e.g. Sullivan and Sapir 2012, Lindberg 2012, Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2010), and so I feel that using his definition of negativity, for instance, is justified also in this respect.

Sullivan and Sapir (2012) study negative advertising and the different ways of doing that in a Taiwanese context. They state that candidates do not simply make the decision to 'go negative' but their strategies vary from attacking on ideology, policy, strategy, or personality, and these choices are influenced for example by context (Sullivan and Sapir 2012: 289). Although they discuss negative advertising and my study is concerned with negativity in campaign blogs, their research is very closely related to mine, since I would argue that the blog posts can be thought of as advertisements in their own right. Like adverts, they try to convince voters of the excellence of the sponsoring candidate and persuade them to vote for them and for example donate money to the campaign effort. Both adverts and blogs are campaigning messages.

Plasser (2000, cited in Sullivan and Sapir 2012: 290) points out that candidates think that going negative is useful for them in their pursuit for office. Lau et al. (2007: 1177) state that what is thought to be a direct benefit of negative advertising is that the negative attacks can decrease the amount of support for an opponent. Emphasizing the flaws of opposing

candidates, doubts can be created concerning those candidates' credentials (Jamieson, Weldman, and Sherr 2000: 45 and Sullivan and Sapir 2012: 291). What Kahn and Kenney (1999, cited in Sullivan and Sapir 2012: 291) mention as a potential reason for using negativity in advertising is merely the fact that in a media environment that is increasingly diverse, a negative message is more memorable than messages that are neutral or positive. This is another reason to study negativity towards the opponent, as it seems that the negative instances carry more influence.

Sullivan and Sapir (2012: 291) state that it is widely noted in previous research that the level of competitiveness can predict the level of going negative in campaigns. Skaperdas and Grofman (1995, cited in Sullivan and Sapir 2012: 291-292) remark that usually the leading candidate is a more positive candidate than his or her opponent, because going negative can also be received badly by their supporters. They go on to say that the "weaker" candidates have to try and convince the opponent's supporters to leave that camp by attacking the opponent and basically get them to become undecided voters (Skaperdas and Grofman 1995, cited in Sullivan and Sapir 2012: 291). Sullivan and Sapir maintain that in a race where the candidates are quite equal in their chance to win, the level of negativity from both candidates increases (2012: 292). These findings concur with the incumbent and challenger strategies outlined by Trent and Friedenberg (2000), as often the challenger candidate, who, by definition, is most often the "weaker" candidate, is more negative in his or her campaign than the incumbent candidate.

An interesting point that Damore (2002, cited in Sullivan and Sapir 2012: 292) mentions is the fact that candidates seem to present more negative ads close to the election and then slightly before Election Day, there seems to be a positive end note. Sullivan and Sapir (2012: 292-293) relate two different reasons for this end-heavy occurrence of negativity. Skaperdas and Grofman (1995) state that close to Election Day, the number of undecided voters who might be influenced by positive ads is diminished and thus, by going negative, support for the opponent is hoped to be reduced. Damore (2002) on the other hand points out that if the candidate goes negative too early, it can give him or her a bad image in the voters' minds, but as the campaign nears its end, the candidate's credibility has already been cemented in the voters' minds and therefore going negative will not do such harm for his or her image. (Sullivan and Sapir 2012: 292-293.)

3 SET-UP OF MY STUDY

3.1 Aims and research questions

My aim in this thesis is to analyze how the blogs on the websites of the American presidential candidates Barack Obama and Mitt Romney create a negative image of the opponent in the election of 2012. My focus will be on the strategies that are used to negatively describe, criticize, and attack the opposing candidate. As I presented above, there have been some previous research on negativity on blogs and different appeal strategies, but there is still a gap in this field. Often studies have only focused on differentiating between attacks and positive appeals, for example, without going any further into the exact ways these attacks and negativity about the opponent are created. The purpose of my study is to go deeper into the specific strategies that are employed to create a negative image of the opponent, and thus contribute new insight into the field of political campaign communication research. The research questions that I will attempt to answer in my study are the following:

1. How do the blogs of the candidates create a negative image of the opposing candidate and their campaign?
   • What kinds of strategies are used to create this negative image?
   • Which strategies are used the most by each candidate?
2. Do both of the blogs create equally negative images of the other candidate or is one of them more negative in tone?

By analyzing the blogs and the explicit negativity in them, I aim at gaining an understanding of how each candidate constructs an unfavorable image for their opponent and thus tries to undermine their credibility and overall success in the race.

3.2 Background on the 2012 election

The presidential election in 2012 was certainly an interesting one. It has been argued, contrary to many statements, that the election was not in the end a very close one (Schlesinger 2013). According to Giroux from Bloomberg, Obama received 65,9 million votes (51,1%) nationally, whereas Romney received 60,9 million votes (47,2%). He goes on to state that

Obama is the first president to reach 51 percent of the vote in two elections since Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956 (Giroux 2013, n.pag). Lichtman (interviewed for Giroux 2013, n.pag) asserts that among some of the elements that were favorable to Obama were the fact that he did not face serious contenders for his party's nomination and the fact that there was no serious rival from any third party. Moreover, Lichtman continues, the lack of scandals or foreign-policy catastrophes and of social unrest during Obama's first presidential term were contributive to his victory (Lichtman, interviewed for Giroux 2013, n.pag).

Maisel (2007: 110) explains that in order to win the presidential race, the candidate needs to secure 270 electoral votes, which is the majority of the Electoral College. The Electoral College system basically means that each state has a certain number of electoral votes given to them. This number depends on the number of representatives that the state has in the House of Representatives. In addition to this, each state gets electoral votes according to the number of senators they have, which is in every case two, as that is how many senators each and every state has. Each state has the right to decide independently how these electors are to be chosen. (Maisel 2007: 106.)

Traditionally, both parties have some states that they will most probably win, and thus, they do not have to concentrate their energies there during the campaign because they essentially know that they will hold those states in the election. Traditionally, the Democrats have a strong base in the New England states, California, and New York. Republicans have their strongest support in the heartland, the Bible Belt states and a large part of the South. In other words, the candidates also know that it is basically futile to try to "steal" those states that are traditionally Red (Republican) or Blue (Democrat). (Maisel 2007: 110).

Thus, there remain a number of states in which the division of votes between the Democrats and the Republicans has traditionally been more uncertain; these are called the 'battleground states'. Each campaign conducts polls in these states to monitor the situation and changing views. If they find that the race is getting tighter, they allot more resources for campaigning to those states. Therefore, throughout the campaign, each presidential nominee must decide where to direct their campaign resources, and also take into consideration the choices that the opposing candidate makes. These are important issues since each state has a different number of electoral votes and so this reflects on both sides' fight over the battleground states when trying to secure the needed 270 votes. (Maisel 2007: 110-111.) Thus, in the election, getting the majority of the popular vote is not as important as getting the 270 electoral votes, and these things do not necessarily go hand in hand as a majority of voters does not as a rule elect a president (Maisel 2007: 106, 110). In other words, it is

possible to win the election with fewer votes in the popular vote, as the key is to win in enough states in order to gather the 270 electoral votes. (Maisel 2007: 110-111.)

In my data, which spans a period of one month prior to Election Day, the importance of the battleground states becomes very apparent as especially during the final days of the campaigns, full focus is on these important states. Maisel (2007: 111) recounts how in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, the battleground states were bombarded with campaign visits of all kinds and a huge number of television adverts, while the other states received little or no attention.

As Giroux (2013) states, in the 2012 election, Obama was able to secure 332 electoral votes and Romney 206 votes. In other words, Obama succeeded to win the popular vote in 26 states and the District of Columbia while Romney won 24 states. The election was close basically in only four states: Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, and Virginia. (Giroux 2013.) In these states, the popular vote margin with which Obama was elected was less than five percentage points. In other states, the winning margin was bigger (Giroux 2013).

3.2.1 The candidates

The incumbent candidate in the election was Barack Obama. On November 4th, 2008, he was elected the 44th president of the United States and was sworn in on January 20th, 2009 (The White House Website). He represents the Democratic Party, and started his career in politics in 1996 in the Illinois State Senate. Before his appointment, he served as a senator for the State of Illinois in the U.S. Senate starting in 2004. Obama was born in Honolulu, Hawaii on August 4th, 1961. He studied at Harvard Law School, and after graduating worked for example as a civil rights lawyer and as a professor at the University of Chicago teaching constitutional law. He has a wife and two daughters. (Barack Obama Website.)

The challenger candidate was Mitt Romney. He served as governor of Massachusetts from 2003 to 2007. He represents the Republican Party, and campaigned for the party's presidential nomination in the 2008 election but was unsuccessful. He has a Bachelor's degree in English from Brigham Young University and a Master's of business administration and law degrees from Harvard University. In addition to his political career, he founded Bain Capital, an investment company in 1984. One of the more significant merits in his career is his organizing the Salt Lake City Olympics in 2002, which had been mired in scandal and financial difficulties. (USA Today.) Romney was born on March 12, 1947 and was raised in Bloomfield, Michigan. He has a wife and five sons. (Friedman 2011.)

3.3 Data

My data are blog posts from the presidential candidates', Barack Obama's and Mitt Romney's, websites from the 2012 election. I will concentrate on the strategic linguistic features found in the textual content of the blogs, such as certain words denoting negativity against the opponent. I will analyze texts posted on the blogs during the last month of campaigning; in other words, during the period of Oct 8th - November 6th. I chose this period to be my focus because I presume that the negativity in the posts that refer to the opponent will increase as Election Day draws near, and therefore this time will probably be most lucrative for my study as my emphasis is on negativity. The period of one month gives me sufficient material to conduct my research and for it to be worthwhile. In a more extensive study, a longer period could be targeted and thus more detailed and comprehensive results could be attained.

My data are naturally occurring data. Silverman states that this kind of data does not have any interference of the researcher, as, for example, would data that is comprised of interviews done by the researcher (2010: 131-132). My data are blog posts from candidate websites, and thus, I have had no interference with them, I merely collect them and analyze them. The method of data collection was to download every blog post as a PDF file and then archive them on my computer. I collected each blog entry starting from October 8th until Election Day, November 6th. In total, Obama's team posted 303 entries and Romney's team posted 254 entries to the blogs during this period. These included reports from the campaign trail, texts presenting the candidates' views on different issues, and letters from voters, to name a few. By looking at a month's worth of posts, I will get a good idea of both of the blogs and I will be able to make some well-justified conclusions about the content found on the blogs as a result of my analysis. If I had chosen a shorter period of time to analyze, my results could not have been very reliably generalized. Thus, by focusing on a longer period, I will get a better understanding of the nature of the two blogs and thus will be better able to give some more general conclusions.

The two blogs are rather similar in their form and the way that they are constructed. Each blog is organized so that the posts are presented on the site in reversed chronological order, so that the newest post is always found on the top of the blog page. The older ones can be found in order by date published by scrolling down the page. Moreover, each post can then

be opened separately in its own window to view the post in full; in the main blog page often only a part of the post is visible. The blog posts themselves are also very similarly organized. There is a heading, and under that, the name of the author of the post is shown along with the date when it was posted. In Obama's blog, some of the posts also have a category to which they belong, and that is shown next to the date. Romney's blog, unlike Obama's, has a sidebar on the right side with links to related posts. Naturally, this feature adds some ease to navigating through the blog. The headings, the author, and the date were written in blue in both blogs, so a similar line was followed there. In the blog posts, below the heading, there is the body of the blog post. On average, Romney's posts were longer than Obama's. Perhaps that has to do with the fact that Romney is the challenger candidate and thus has to convince voters that Obama has not done well in his first term and has to present his own vision for the future, and this of course requires plenty of space. Moreover, both blogs included hyperlinks to other features on the websites.

Both Obama's and Romney's blog posts almost every time included a photo or an image of some kind, sometimes a graph. Usually the photo was of the sponsor candidate himself, but Romney also tended to post pictures of Obama when a certain post targeted the President. Not surprisingly, these pictures were often quite unflattering, and thus a certain image was being created of Obama also through visual means. Notably, Obama's blog did not feature such negative pictures of Romney. Both blogs also presented plenty of pictures showing supporters campaigning for the candidate. Obama's blog had much more pictures of supporters and voters, who also for example wrote letters to the President, which were occasionally posted on the blog.

Overall, Obama's blog has a more modern and stylized look than Romney's blog. In my opinion, Obama has consistently attempted to build an image of himself as a modern president, someone who is in with the times and understands young people and can speak their language, as it were. This was visible already during his first bid for presidency in 2008. In fact, he was relatively young compared to the usual trend when he was elected President in 2008, as he was only 47 years old. Thus, I think that he has an image that is overall quite youthful.

However, although it would be very interesting to analyze the picture content of the blogs in more detail, the focus of this current study is only on the texts. For instance, Obama's blog also includes many videos that were a key part of their Internet campaign strategy and which did include rather a lot of negativity against Romney, but it is not feasible in this present study to analyze them; that has to be done in another study.

3.4 Methods of analysis

In this chapter, I present the methods that I have used in my analysis. I begin with giving an overview of the overall methodological basis of the study, which relies on content analysis and grounded theory. I then continue with illustrating the campaign communication strategies created by Trent and Friedenberg (2000), which I will, to a certain extent, apply in my analysis. Finally, I explain my choice for the unit of analysis in this study.

3.4.1 Content analysis and grounded theory methods

The methodological basis for my research is content analysis. Silverman (2010: 123) describes textual analysis to be, in a quantitative sense, "content analysis, i.e. counting in terms of researchers' categories", and in a qualitative sense, "understanding participants' categories". Thus, what I will be doing in my analysis is textual analysis as my data are blog posts on candidate websites. It is content analysis because I will analyze the content of those blog posts in terms of the ways of creating a negative image of the opponent. In my analysis, I will conduct quantitative analysis as well, as I will be counting the instances of each kind of strategy used, i.e. based on my categories of strategies.

Frey, Botan, Friedman, and Kreps (1999: 212) define content analysis for communication researchers as "identifying and examining messages contained in a text". They state that the foremost aim of content analysis is to give a description of the characteristics of messages that are found in both mediated and public texts. They point out that a defining feature of content analysis is that it analyzes the data "as they appear in a context". (Frey et al. 1999: 213.)

Wright (1986: 125-126, cited in Berger 2011: 205) gives a clear definition of content analysis. He defines it as "a research technique for the systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain usually predetermined categories". In this study, I divide different strategies of building a negative image of the opponent into separate categories. However, all of the categories are not predefined, but will be worked out as I analyze my data (see below). After deciding on the categories for each strategy, I will classify the instances of negativity into these categories and describe the content of each category. Wright goes on to say that each category has to be defined in clear terms so that

they are reliable also in future research occasions (1986: 125-126, cited in Berger 2011: 206). Thus, the categories must be defined clearly and consistently.

As I mentioned above, I will use both predefined categories and categories that I build myself during my analysis. In this second source of categorization, my tool will be the *constant comparative method*, which I will present in more detail later. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain that in the constant comparative method, it is thought that categories are not predefined, but arise through constant comparison of incidents in the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967, cited in Taylor and Bogdan 1998: 137) state that in the constant comparative method, the researcher "simultaneously codes and analyzes data in order to develop concepts". The researcher keeps comparing different incidents found in the data and in so doing, "refines these concepts, identifies their properties, explores their relationships to one another, and integrates them into a coherent theory" (Glaser and Strauss 1967, cited in Taylor and Bogdan 1998: 137). This is the method through which I will create some of the categories during my analysis.

I will use a grounded theory approach, and by this I mean that in my research, the theory that I build will consist of explaining and describing the phenomenon in focus. In my study, this means explaining how the candidates create a negative image of the opponent. Therefore, the kind of grounded theory that I will use in my study is an applied version of the theory.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) present grounded theory as a qualitative analytic tool in their influential book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. They simply define grounded theory as discovering theory from data. They state that a key strategy in their discovering of grounded theory is a "general method of comparative analysis". (1967: 1.) Glaser and Strauss point out that what generating a theory from data means is that "most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research" (1967: 6.) Thus, during my study as well, I will develop categories and my explanation of the phenomenon at hand by continuously returning to the data and working with it.

Glaser and Strauss (1967: 23) state that during the process of discovering theory, the researcher develops "conceptual categories or their properties from evidence" and after this, illustrates the concept by using the evidence from which the category was formed. In my study, I will develop categories in part by analyzing my data, and then I will present examples from this data to illustrate each category and its properties.

Birks and Mills state that the first stage of data analysis in grounded theory is initial coding (2011: 9). During this phase, the researcher simply identifies important words, for instance, in the data and then labels them, which is the process of coding the instances, and through this process, categories are formed. Birks and Mills also point out that these categories are theoretically saturated when as a result of new data analysis, the coded instances fit to the previously formed categories and when these categories are explained in a sufficient way regarding their dimensions and properties. (Birks and Mills 2011: 9-10.)

Birks and Mills go on to explain that an integral part of grounded theory research is concurrent data generation or collection and analysis. This means that the researcher collects data with "an initially purposive sample", and after these "encounters" are coded, more data is gathered. They present this strategy as a contrast to the researcher first collecting data and then analyzing it. (Birks and Mills 2011: 10.) In my study, however, I collected the data before I started to analyze it. Nevertheless, I did a sample analysis of a small section of my data to test the feasibility of my research problem and methods of analysis. In this way, it could be said, that my study follows the principles of grounded theory, although a modified version of it, in its idea of going back to the data and analyzing it while at the same time modifying the categories for the analysis. As I have pointed out previously, I do not have all of the categories predefined before I begin my analysis, but I work with the data and in part develop categories based on what I find in my data. In this way, my research includes features of grounded theory research.

According to Birks and Mills, another important part of grounded theory research is the process of writing memos. This simply means that throughout the analytic process, the researcher writes memos, which will in the end of the process become the findings of the research. (Birks and Mills 2011: 10.) During my research, this kind of continuous writing process was a key part of my analysis.

Birks and Mills state that the process of *constant comparative analysis* is a central part of grounded theory. The researcher constantly compares different incidents to each other, different categories to each other, and so on. This comparison continues until "a grounded theory is fully integrated". Grounded theory methods are inductive, which means that theory is constructed from the data itself. The process of inducing theory is achieved by doing successive comparative analyses. (Birks and Mills 2011: 11.) My aim is to describe systematically the phenomenon under investigation, and thus what I intend to do through constant comparative analysis is to form the categories that are central to my analysis and that describe the strategies that are used in creating a negative image of the opponent. Thus, what I

will achieve through constant comparative analysis are descriptive categories that explain the workings of this kind of political communication in one specific context. Therefore, in my study, developing a grounded theory that is fully integrated simply means that I have systematically and consistently described the phenomenon at hand.

In addition to developing categories as I analyze and go through my data with the help of constant comparative analysis, I will employ the campaign communication strategies that Trent and Friedenberg (2000) have created. They describe different communication strategies that the incumbent and challenger candidates can use. The categories that they have formed concern a wider array of strategies than what are present in my data, and therefore, I will only refer to those categories of theirs which are relevant for my research.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) define the coding process and the emergence of categories through the constant comparative method very clearly. They state that each incident in the data is coded into "as many categories of analysis as possible, as categories emerge or as data emerge that fit an existing category" (1967: 105). They remark that while the analyst is coding a specific incident into a category, it should be compared with the other incidents already coded into that same category. Through this process of constant comparison of the incidents, theoretical properties are soon created for each category. (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 106.) Thus, in my analysis as well, I will constantly compare each instance of negativity to others to determine in which category to place it, and also through this dividing of incidents, these categories themselves will be created and their properties and dimensions will be defined.

Glaser and Strauss (1967: 108) present another stage in constant comparative analysis, which is "integrating categories and their properties". The comparison moves on from comparing one incident to another to comparing each incident to the properties of categories that were developed from the original process of comparing incidents to one another. (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 108.) Through this process, the analytic categories become more clearly defined. Glaser and Strauss (1967: 109) point out that as the categories become more integrated along with their properties through constant comparison, the theory evolves because the analyst must "make some related theoretical sense of each comparison". Thus, as I will compare different incidents to others and later, to the properties of categories, as I am placing them in different categories, I will develop my theory further; or to put it more accurately in relation to my study, I will start to get a clear picture of the phenomenon that I am studying and in that way my theory, my understanding of it, crystallizes.

Birks and Mills state that intermediate analysis is an integral part of grounded theory research. This means that it is important to move between initial coding and intermediate coding throughout the previously described concurrent data collection and analysis, and the process of constant comparison of data. Through intermediate coding, the researcher forms the final categories by connecting sub-categories and establishes their properties, and also ties categories together. (Birks and Mills 2011: 11-12.) During my process of analysis, I will also define sub-categories to each separate category to better describe the strategies.

Birks and Mills (2011: 12) state that the final product of grounded theory research is "an integrated and comprehensive grounded theory that explains a process or scheme associated with a phenomenon". Thus, what my grounded theory research produces is an explanation and description of the process of creating a negative image for an opposing candidate in blog posts on campaign websites in the context of the American presidential election of 2012.

Overall, my research employs content analysis and grounded theory within it, and it also uses the constant comparative method while constructing theory, i.e. describing the phenomenon at hand. Furthermore, I will perform quantitative analysis as well. The aim of this analysis will be to discover more general patterns of negativity in the data. Moreover, by counting the instances of negativity about the opponent for each candidate, I will find out which of the candidates can be said to use more negative campaign communication in their blogs and what kinds of strategies are used the most. This will give interesting additional information about the candidates' communication tactics online and offer enlightening comparisons.

3.4.2 Political campaign communication strategies of Trent and Friedenberg

In this chapter, I will discuss the campaign communication strategies that Trent and Friedenberg (2000) have created and that I will, in part, employ in my analysis. In the following section I refer to my own data when relevant to illustrate the categories presented in regards to my material.

As I have outlined above, in my analysis, I will also employ certain parts of the model provided by Trent and Friedenberg in their book *Political Campaign Communication. Principles and Practices* (2000). They discuss the notion of political campaign communication widely in their work, but what interests me is their handling of the topic of campaign styles and strategies. Trent and Friedenberg point out that campaign styles in

elections have varied over the years and continue to do so, and they mention that there has not been much systematic research on these communicative strategies because of their widely varied nature. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 63.) They discuss style as linked to language, in other words to verbal communication, but they point out that nowadays style is also something that is linked to nonverbal communication. They go on to argue that the analysis of style is relevant to their study as they look at style as a "manner of campaigning that can be recognized by the characteristics defining it and giving it form". In their study, they use the term "communication strategies" for these characteristics they discuss. They differentiate between three styles: the "incumbency style", the "challenger style", and their combination, the "incumbent/challenger style". (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 64-65.)

Trent and Friedenberg primarily deal with verbal or nonverbal campaign communication, such as appearance, and do not mention blog text or blog-based communication in their work. However, I think that their model and definitions are applicable as a basis for my own research. Although there are differences between political campaign communication in the form of speeches and blog text, for example, there are also many similarities as they are both communication in their own ways, just through different mediating means.

Trent and Friedenberg also discuss image and campaign style. They point out that all candidates have to do whatever is needed to make voters like them, in other words, to make the voters view them in a positive light. Trent and Friedenberg maintain that creating an image and managing it is extremely important for a candidate since it is clear that voters compare the candidates and their behavior to their idealized notions of what a candidate seeking a certain office should be like. Moreover, it may be very crucial in terms of election success of a candidate how well the candidate can live up to these subjective notions on voters' minds. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 65, 69.)

The model that Trent and Friedenberg present and that I will also employ to an extent will be discussed in the following. Their model describes three different basic styles used by candidates in their campaigns in all kinds of elections. As was previously stated, these styles are the "incumbency style", the "challenger style", and the combination of the two, the "incumbent/challenger style". Trent and Friedenberg identified fifteen incumbency style strategies and seven challenger strategies. They explain that campaign styles are "sets of communication strategies employed at times by all candidates" (2000: 76). They also point out that incumbent candidates are not solely forced to use the incumbent strategies, just as the challenger is not tied only to the challenger strategies. Instead, candidates may mix the

strategies during the campaign so that they switch from one strategy to another according to the context in the contest. They point out that electoral campaigns today are quite lengthy so one single style is unlikely to be applicable during the entire campaign. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 76-77.) This is accurate also with regards to the presidential campaigns of 2012 in focus here.

Firstly, Trent and Friedenberg define the incumbency style. It has a long tradition in American elections, but it has nonetheless been quite vaguely defined. Incumbency style consists of symbolic and pragmatic communication strategies the purpose of which is twofold: firstly, to make the candidate seem good enough for the contested position and secondly, to make them appear as "possessing the office (an assumed incumbency stance)". Trent and Friedenberg point out that image creation and its maintenance is not an easy task but that it is extremely valuable to build a credible incumbency style; incumbents have a tendency to win elections. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 77.)

Trent and Friedenberg describe the specific strategies that are used by candidates as they try to get the "advantages of incumbency". They identify four different symbolic strategies and eleven pragmatic strategies. (2000: 78.) In the following, I will not describe all of these strategies, but give an overview and mainly concentrate on the ones relevant to my analysis. One symbolic factor that is part of the incumbency style is the legitimacy of the office. The president has public trust behind him or her and no other candidate can have this same advantage in the race. The incumbents are thus legitimate candidates for the office that is being fought over. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 79-80.) However, I would say that the degree of trust and acceptance that an incumbent has from the voters can vary greatly. Still, I believe what Trent and Friedenberg mean by this is that naturally the voters have more trust on the incumbent than on the challenger as the incumbent has already been elected president previously and thus could not have become President without major trust and support from the voters. Thus, more trust is inherently placed on the incumbent than the challenger candidate.

Another strategy that the authors present has to do with competency and this strategy comes with the office. A sense of competency is linked to the president naturally, and the president can create this impression with ease. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 80.) Moreover, Trent and Friedenberg (2000: 80-81) point out that what is included in the incumbency style is also the charisma that comes with the office. This is also a valuable ingredient in this style.

Trent and Friedenberg then go on to explain the different pragmatic strategies that are included in the incumbent style. They mention the tactic of creating pseudoevents, appointing

friends to jobs or committees, creating task forces to investigate an issue that is important to a certain constituency, and giving funds or grants to public officials who are supportive of the candidate as these kinds of pragmatic strategies. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 82-84.)

In addition, consulting with world leaders is one strategy included in the incumbency style. This strategy can easily be applied both by the incumbent and the challenger candidate; for the challenger this is mainly done to assert his or her legitimacy or importance. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 85.) On the other hand, in a campaign, the opponent can be criticized for not consulting or having no ties to world leaders and thus the attempt is to undermine the opponent. Trent and Friedenberg (2000: 87) discuss a strategy that is especially crucial to the challenger, but is part of the incumbency style and that is the receiving of endorsements from other leaders. The point of this strategy is to get credibility by being associated with an established leader. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 87.) This strategy was used to a great extent by Romney. His blog has a string of posts that report on which newspapers or political leaders have decided to support him and why. In other words, he wants to show which members of the media and of the political specter endorse him in his race for president.

An important strategy in the incumbency style is also the emphasizing of accomplishments. This is very important for sitting presidents, as they have to show what they have accomplished and in this way show that they deserve their position. If there are not many accomplishments or if there are big problems, the options for the incumbents are either to deny this fact or to blame it on someone else. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 87-88.) This kind of strategy of accomplishment emphasizing is important in building a positive image for the candidate. In my view, often this kind of accomplishment listing is linked to comparisons with the contending candidate and in this way the idea is also to create a negative image of this other candidate. In my analysis I refer to this strategy but in an opposite way; one of my strategy categories includes the *minimizing* of the opponent's accomplishments.

Trent and Friedenberg also present the strategy of building an image that shows that the candidate is "above political trenches", and is sort of "removed from politics". The idea is to appear as a statesman, not a politician. In this strategy it is implied that being political would in some way "dirty" the office of president. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 88-89.) Perhaps it could be said that this strategy would also be a kind of an attack on the challenger candidate because he or she is obviously being political, for example in attacking the incumbent's past record, unlike the incumbent who is dignifiedly removed from such political action. In my data, this kind of a comparison can be made, because it is clear that Obama's blog is not as negative towards Romney as Romney's is towards Obama. Perhaps that is

exactly for the reasons that Trent and Friedenberg discuss. Obama has to act like a statesman: appearing dignified and not stooping down on Romney's level, so to speak, not resorting to negative attacks. This may be one conclusion to be drawn from the data.

In addition, the strategy of using surrogates on the campaign trail is part of the incumbency style. This means that the campaign utilizes members of the candidate's family or cabinet officers, for example, to go and campaign for the candidate around the country. This kind of strategy is also part of creating an image of the incumbent candidate as a hardworking, nonpolitical statesman, who mainly stays in the White House performing his or her presidential duties. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 89-90.) This is not really accurate regarding the campaign of 2012 of the incumbent Obama as he was active in campaigning around the country. However, he did use surrogates in his campaign as well, as did the challenger Romney.

Trent and Friedenberg also articulate some disadvantages that are linked to incumbency style. The incumbent has to run on his record, at least to an extent, and this may create a problem for him or her, depending on the record. Trent and Friedenberg point out that a challenger can make the incumbent's record and the possible problems in it the basis of their own campaign rhetoric. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 92-93.) This is exactly what Romney has done in his campaign, since he attacks Obama's past record very forcibly and makes that one of the central strategies in his campaign. Trent and Friedenberg (2000: 93) also mention that often for the incumbent candidate, defense is a more likely strategy than an attack strategy.

Another possible problem for the incumbent candidate is the fact that the public may blame them for all existing problems. The public's view of the candidate's competency is then related to the perceived problems or the lack thereof. Moreover, it is noted that the incumbents have the burden of actually attending to their tasks as President also during their reelection campaigns, which is naturally something that the challenger does not have to worry about. The incumbents are also in a kind of a front-runner position in elections so that if they cannot meet the expectations that are placed on them, they might have a problem. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 93.)

The second style that Trent and Friedenberg define is the challenger style. This style consists in essence of communication strategies that are created to make the voters think that change is needed and also that the challenger candidate is most capable of actualizing this change (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 93-94). Thus, the challenger has to both call for change and show that he or she can accomplish this change (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 94). This

basic idea of the challenger style is clearly manifested in Romney's campaign style. In the following I will explain some of the different strategies included in the challenger style as defined by Trent and Friedenberg. As with the incumbency style, I will concentrate on the ones related to my study and give an overview of the majority of the other strategies.

The first, and one of the most central strategies, is attacking the opponent's record. This ability to freely criticize the incumbent candidate, often harshly, is one of the most important tools for the challenger. The goal of this strategy is to create doubt in the voters' minds about the incumbent president and his or her capabilities or to increase the electorate's awareness of some problems in the state of things. Trent and Friedenberg maintain that even if the public viewed the incumbent very favorably, attacks would still be made by minimizing the value of his or her accomplishments, by choosing not to mention these achievements, or by giving the credit for them to someone other than the president. All in all, attacking the incumbent's record or policies is a very central strategy for the challenger. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 94-96.)

Another challenger strategy is taking the offensive position on issues. This means that the challenger continues to take an offensive stand towards issues that are central to the campaign and questioning and attacking them but never giving actual solutions to these problems. Trent and Friedenberg also mention that the challenger's rhetoric may well be narrowed down to developing problems, and in the mean time the incumbent must then defend his or her actions. The idea behind this strategy is that basically the challenger does not have to have any concrete solutions since he has not been in office, and furthermore, the more solutions the challenger would present, the more material the incumbent would get for his or her own attacks. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 96-97.) In my view, Romney has used this strategy very extensively, and moreover, he has kept the amount of detail in his solutions for problems to a minimum, at least according to Obama's side, probably for the exact reason of not handing "weapons" to Obama's campaign team.

Trent and Friedenberg (2000: 97) mention that simply calling for change is one dominant strategy in the challenger style. Another strategy is employing a rhetoric that emphasizes optimism for the future. This is especially important for challengers who call for change. This does not mean that talking about problems is disregarded, but the emphasis is firmly on the hope for the future. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 98.)

Key to the challenger strategy is also to appear to represent the philosophical center of the political party whose candidate they are (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 99). This has been visible in Romney's style as well. It is widely thought that Romney used to be from the more

conservative end of the Republican Party spectrum in many of his positions. However, after becoming the party's presidential nominee, it has been said that he has been moving closer to the center of the party in his views on many issues. Thus, I would suggest that Romney has clearly employed this challenger style strategy during his campaign to appear more moderate and thus to appeal to more voters. Naturally, this is then something that the incumbent candidate can target as he or she can criticize this kind of a sudden change in political views in the party's ideological spectrum. This kind of 'flip-flop' tendency is something that Obama did criticize to quite a great extent in his attacks.

Another challenger strategy that Trent and Friedenberg present is delegating personal or harsh attacks. A successful candidate him or herself does not "indulge in demagogic rhetoric". Trent and Friedenberg point out that usually the harsh language is reserved for the use of running mates and surrogate speakers as well as television adverts and printed material. The thinking behind this is that a campaign is symbolic in nature and it is a representation of how the candidates might behave if they got elected for president. Trent and Friedenberg state that demagogy is never thought of as an asset for the candidate; attacks on the person are not viewed approvingly. In other words, policies can be attacked but the character of the candidate may not. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 100-101.) However, this was not the case in my data, as even harsh attacks on the opponent's character were made, mainly from the challenger's side.

These are most of the challenger strategies defined by Trent and Friedenberg. As with the incumbent style, these are not exclusively reserved for the challenger candidates to use, but also the incumbents often employ these strategies. Trent and Friedenberg maintain that candidates can blend the two styles introduced. Often it is advantageous for the challenger to include incumbent strategies whenever he or she can, as they are very powerful. Moreover, incumbent candidates use challenger strategies for example by having surrogate speakers to dish out the harsher attacks on the opponent. Trent and Friedenberg emphasize the importance of creating an image and maintaining it for the candidates. (Trent and Friedenberg 2000: 101-102.) The creation of a certain kind of image is a central theme also in my study. However, while Trent and Friedenberg mainly focus on the image creation of each candidate for themselves, I will concentrate on the image that is created not for the candidate himself but for the opposing candidate, and in particular the creation of a negative image. Although the style strategies that Trent and Friedenberg have outlined are not concentrated on image creation of the opponent per se, many of the strategies they describe include the purpose to either create a positive image of oneself or a negative one of the opposing candidate. Thus, I

will apply the definitions of campaigning strategies and styles that Trent and Friedenberg present. Nevertheless, I will be referring only to those strategies that apply to my data, and I will refer both to incumbent and challenger strategies with both Obama and Romney, so I will not in effect follow the incumbent-challenger division. As Trent and Friedenberg point out, using strategies from each category by both candidates is very typical.

For example, one key challenger style strategy is to attack the opponent's record. My research question deals with the creation of a negative image of the opponent, and in order to do that, attacking the opponent's record is one possible course of action. This is something that I found Romney's campaign to include in abundance; in fact, most of the blog posts that tried to create a negative image of President Obama were using the tactic of attacking his record during the years he has served as President. In addition, although Trent and Friedenberg do not present strategies that the incumbent, in my case President Obama, uses to create a negative image of the challenger in a clear-cut way, I think the authors' principles can be applied to Obama's campaign as well.

Therefore, in my research, I use Trent and Friedenberg's campaign style strategy categories as part of the basis for my own analysis. As I try to discover how a negative image is created for the opponent, I will refer to some of the categories outlined above. Many studies refer to Trent and Friedenberg's work on campaign strategies and their division of incumbent and challenger strategies (see e.g. Denton, Jr. and Kuypers 2008, Vesnic-Alujevic 2011). Thus, it is valid and justifiable to refer to their theorization in my study, as well.

3.4.3 Unit of analysis

Titscher et al. (2000) mention that "the central tool of any content analysis is its system of categories". This means that every unit of analysis must be allocated to one or several categories the definitions of which must be explicit. (Titscher et al. 2000: 58.) Thus, in my study, I will have different categories for the types of negative references to the opposing candidate. For example, I have categories such as *attacking the past record of the opponent* and *attacking the personal characteristics of the opponent*. These examples are from Trent and Friedenberg and some of my other categories are also based on their categories in the incumbency and challenger strategies and styles. I will analyze the blog posts by looking at the sections or sentences that are explicitly creating a negative image of the opponent and by dividing them into categories that specify how exactly the sections are building this negative image; by attacking the record or attacking personal characteristics of the opponent, etc.

Frey, Botan, and Kreps (2000: 240) talk about the process of unitizing, by which researchers identify "the appropriate message unit to code". They speak primarily of quantitative analysis, but all the same, in qualitative analysis, the unit of coding must be selected before the analysis can begin. Frey et al. (2000: 240) refer to Krippendorf (1980) who has identified five different kinds of units in content analysis, and the one that I will employ in my study is the *syntactical unit*. Syntactical units simply refer to "discrete units of language, such as individual words, sentences, and paragraphs" (Frey et al. 2000: 240). I have chosen a sentence as my unit of analysis. Thus, I will analyze those sentences that include explicit negativity towards the opposing candidate and divide the different strategies used in them to their respective categories. However, the immediate surrounding context is taken into account, so that if the unit of analysis is for example a very short phrase and needs the previous sentence to be fully understood, this preceding sentence is counted as part of the unit of analysis. In the next section, I explain my process of analysis in more detail and present my findings.

4   ANALYSIS

In the following sections, I present my analysis and results. First, I begin by presenting the analysis categories and sub-categories that I have used. After that, I present my findings, first regarding Romney's blog and then Obama's blog.

4.1 Strategy categories

My analysis is based on categorizing the strategies of building a negative image of the opponent. The first step was to go through all of the posts from the period of one month. In total, there were 303 posts published on Obama's blog and 254 posts on Romney's blog. I placed all posts with explicit negativity into one folder and posts with more implicit negativity into another, for each candidate respectively. By doing this, I wanted to see whether my choice of definition of negativity was usable. In other words, I needed to see if there were enough posts with explicit negativity in them for my analysis. After completing this step, I found that Obama's blog had 63 posts with explicit negativity during the target period; in other words, 21% of all of the posts on his blog had explicit negativity. Romney's blog, on the other hand, had 151 posts with explicit negativity, which amounts to 59% of all of the posts. Already from this comparison it becomes very clear which of the candidates was more negative towards his opponent. With regard to implicit cases of negativity, Obama's

blog had 25 cases, which is 8% out of the total of 303 posts, whereas Romney's had 35 cases, which is 14% out of the total number of posts. Both blogs also contained posts with no negativity whatsoever. Obama's blog had 215 of such posts, which is 71% out of the total number of posts, and Romney's blog had 68, which is 27% out of the total. This difference between the two candidates in this respect is momentous, but it does comply with the basic assumption that the challenger candidate will be more aggressive and negative towards his or her opponent than the incumbent. After this division of posts into a folder of explicit cases and another with implicit cases, I discovered that I can use my chosen definition of negativity that only takes into account the explicit cases, since there is enough material to analyze.

The second step in my analysis was to organize the explicit negative instances in the posts into different categories according to how the negativity is created. By this I mean that I analyzed what kinds of strategies are used to create a negative image for the opposing candidate. As I have explained previously, these categories will follow both the strategies that Trent and Friedenberg (2000) have outlined and categories that I have myself devised through my analysis. In practice, I analyzed the posts and the exact instances in them that are building the negative image in more detail, and placed these instances into the different categories. In addition, I have created different sub-categories to each of the main categories, and thus the instances will be divided into these sub-categories after the initial division. At the end of my analysis, I will look at which strategies were used the most by each candidate. I will also have a look at the overall amount of negativity towards the opponent that is manifested in each blog.

As was to be expected, an important issue that arose during my analysis was the fact that the instances of explicit negativity did not fit neatly only into one category, but rather could be placed in several different categories. More often than not, the instances would fit in three or four categories equally well. This is simply a testament to the complexity of language and how language instances cannot always be simply divided into neat categories. These instances of negativity were then placed in multiple categories in my analysis.

Another point to be considered during the analysis was that as language and meaning are not constructed in a vacuum, I have taken into account also the context of the sentences or instances that create the negativity. In other words, although a sentence might not be explicitly negative on its own (because it is a very short clause with maybe only two or three words or it becomes understood only after one has read the preceding sentence, e.g.), I will include it in my analysis if the negativity becomes very explicit in the context.

In addition, in my analysis, through the concept of metonymy I have decided to include also other things than the candidate himself to "stand in" for the candidates. An example of metonymy is that the word "Washington" can be used to stand in for "the government of the United States". As Yule (2006) explains, this is an example of a "representative-symbol relationship". Applying one word to refer to the other in this kind of a pair of words is an illustration of metonymy. (Yule 2006: 108.) Thus, in my example above, the word "Washington" is the symbol and "the government" is the representative. In my thesis, I will also view negativity that is targeted against the campaign of the candidate or the vice president or vice presidential candidate as being essentially targeted at the candidates themselves by extension. Moreover, negative references to the Administration or "the past four years" will be seen as targeted against Obama. For example, if in a blog post there is a phrase such as "their campaign misleads you to believe that…", I will count "the campaign" to be an extension of the candidate himself, and thus this reference to be a negative one towards that candidate.

Based on previous research and through grounded theory methods and the constant comparative method in going through my data, I have devised the following eight strategy categories. Each of these categories is composed of so-called "sub-categories", which I will use when I present my analysis. I chose to do this division into sub-categories to better and more clearly illustrate my findings. Below, I will describe my chosen categories individually, and after that, proceed to my findings. I will present my findings first concerning Romney's blog and then I proceed to Obama's blog. In the following, I will only use the pronoun "he" as both of the candidates in my data are men, and all of the presidential candidates in the United States in the general election stage have been men; hence my usage of only "he" below.

1. Attacking the candidate's policy positions, proposals, agenda, plans and solutions

The first category deals with explicitly negative instances that employ the strategy of attacking the candidate's policy positions, proposals, agenda, plans and solutions, for instance. I have divided the ways of using this strategy into four separate sub-categories. The first sub-category that I have devised is *criticizing the opponent's plans and proposals for the future*. This strategy is a central one in election campaigns, as the main task is to try and show the voters that the candidate can offer better plans for the future if elected than the opponent.

Naturally, during a campaign, each candidate must present some information about their plans for the future and in so doing they provide material for the opponents to attack on.

The second sub-category is *criticizing the approach or course of action that the opponent has taken in relation to something*. This strategy criticizes the way in which the opponent has reacted to something or what kind of an approach they have taken towards an issue. This is a more useful strategy for the challenger candidate to use, as there is more material for these kinds of attacks in regards to the incumbent candidate.

The third sub-category is *attacking the policies that the candidate has promoted or still promotes*. The reason for showing the opponent's policies in a negative light is to make the case that one's own policies would be better and that the opponent's policies have been bad or even harmful. Underlying all of this is the call for change and the implication that the sponsor candidate can bring about that change. In the United States, there is often a great divide between the policy positions that Democrats and Republicans have. This is naturally a simplification to a certain extent, but it is true that the positions that the candidates of the opposing parties hold can be very strongly conflicting. One can make some generalizations about how Democrats and Republicans usually feel about certain issues or what types of values they can traditionally be said to gravitate towards.

The fourth sub-category is *attacking the positions, philosophies or "messages" that the candidate has and is promoting*. These attacks are targeted at more general positions the opponent has or the overall philosophy they promote in terms of economy, for instance.

2. Attacking the personal/professional characteristics of the candidate, his values, views, and his integrity

The second category includes the use of attacks against the personal or professional characteristics of the opponent, which includes attacks towards his or her values, views, and integrity, for instance. The first sub-category for this specific strategy is *criticizing the opponent's behavior and character and depicting it as unpresidential, dishonest, and lacking integrity*. Two important characteristics for a president are honesty and integrity. Naturally then, to diminish the opposing candidate's popularity or tarnish their image, one must attack their behavior and personal character. It is a very important thing in politics that you appear to be trustworthy and truthful. Therefore, a candidate must try and convince the voters that this is not the case with the opponent. Overall, it is integral to try and depict the opponent as behaving in an unpresidential manner, and in that way, to try and undermine their credibility.

The second sub-category is *attacking the values and worldviews that the opponent has and promotes.* Besides the competence of a candidate, the values that he promotes are a key issue in a presidential election. Voters want to support a candidate who has a similar worldview and value base to one's own. Therefore, it is an essential tool in a campaign to try and describe the opponent's values in a bad way.

3. Attacking the candidate's professional traits, leadership qualities, and competence

The first sub-category deals with *attacks against the competence of the opponent*. It is integral for a candidate to convince the voters that the opponent is not qualified for the position of President. Competence naturally is one of the most important things that are considered when voting for a candidate. The central idea here is to try and convince people that the opponent does not have the professional qualities to be President because his actions have been failures.

The second sub-category includes *attacks against the leadership abilities of the opponent*. The President of the United States is often referred to, at least by the Americans, as the Leader of the Free World, and thus the ability to lead and be a good leader are characteristics that are held in high regard in a presidential candidate. Therefore, weakening the image of the opponent as being a great leader is very important in creating a negative image for him.

4. Attacking the strategy of the campaign, the business of campaigning, "dirty tricks", negative ads and campaigning

This fourth strategy category deals with instances that try to create a negative image for the opponent by attacking the strategy of campaigning the other side has employed. The first sub-category is *criticizing the negativity in the opponent's campaign strategy*. In my view, this is the most used strategy in this category. Even though both sides are at times very negative against the opponent, it is still deemed acceptable to accuse the other side of being overly negative and in that way distasteful in their campaigning. These attacks can be against, for instance, the adverts of the other side, the attacks that the other side has launched against the sponsor candidate, and criticism about the so-called "dirty tricks" of the opponent against the other candidate.

The second sub-category is *criticizing the opponent as campaigning in an unpresidential way*. It is highly important that a presidential candidate behaves in a dignified

and competent manner, and thus trying to undermine this image by claiming that the opponent behaves in a manner not suitable for a President is a very potent strategy in creating a negative image for him.

The third sub-category is *attacking the business side of campaigning*. This includes criticism about the amount of money being used on campaigning by the other side, and often on *negative* campaigning, it is claimed. These attacks are often used to make the sponsor candidate seem to be in the underdog position in a way, as opposed to the other side that has allegedly vast resources at hand.

The fourth and final sub-category is *criticizing the opponent's campaign strategy altogether*. It is fairly self-explanatory as to what kinds of instances belong to this category, but mainly instances that criticize the campaigning of the opponent in a general manner or overall.

5. Attacking the candidate's past record and calling for change

This strategy is one of the most used strategies to be found in the blog posts. This strategy is also one of the most powerful ones, since the attempt here is to convince the voters that the opponent has been a failure in the past and that a change is needed, which the sponsor candidate can bring about. Overall, at the center of this strategy are criticizing the past record of the opponent, calling for change, and minimizing whatever accomplishments the opponent might have achieved in the past.

The first sub-category is *attacking the opponent's past record* – in Obama's case, as President and as a politician in Romney's case, to express it simply. This includes criticizing what the candidate has done in terms of decisions, policies, perceived failures, and basically anything negative that can be found in their past. As is well known, "digging for dirt" from the opponent's past is a key strategy when trying to create a negative image for him. In addition, it is important to show voters why the opponent does not merit being elected due to their performance in the past. Also central in this strategy is the other side, which is to convince people that the sponsor candidate *can* perform in the future and make the needed changes.

The second sub-category is *blaming the opponent for breaking his or her promises*. This is a strategy that is most useful for challenger candidates because they are in a position to accuse the incumbent of this, whereas the incumbents do not have as much material perhaps to attack the challenger, since they have not been in such a high position giving promises.

The third sub-category is *minimizing the accomplishments of the opponent*. This has also proved to be more of a challenger strategy based on my findings. It is easy for the challenger to attack the things that the incumbent has done while being president and whatever accomplishments he can be said to have attained, are minimized as much as possible. The challenger cannot always completely disregard the incumbent's accomplishments, and then the only thing to do is to minimize their importance or try and give the merit to someone else, as Trent and Friedenberg also stated (2000: 95).

6. Showing how electing the candidate would lead to or create a bad future

This strategy is an effective one and the aim of it is to paint a terrifying picture of the future if the opponent is elected President. This scare tactic can be powerful in creating a negative image for the opponent. The first sub-category in this strategy is *trying to convince voters that the opponent would make bad decisions and implement harmful policies*. These instances attempt to alarm the voters by claiming that it would not be a wise choice to vote for the opponent since that would lead to a bad future.

The second sub-category is *trying to show that the opponent does not have a plan for the future*. This strategy also attempts to build a picture of uncertainty about the opponent and what the future would hold were he elected.

The third sub-category is *trying to convince the voters that electing the opponent will be dangerous and lead to harmful things*. This is the ultimate scare tactics approach the goal of which is to describe how harmful and even dangerous it would be if the opponent were elected.

7. Attacking the attacks that the opponent has made and pointing out the falsity of the claims made

In an election campaign, it is customary that each side slings all manner of attacks against the opponent. It is also similarly the norm that the attacked side will defend itself and try to disqualify the attacks made against them. The first sub-category is *claiming that the other side's attacks are lies and contain false information*. It is integral to prove that the other side's negative claims are false and to provide correct information concerning the issue at hand instead. In addition, when the attacked candidate corrects the claims that are said about him,

he can get an additional benefit by being able to accuse the other side of lying and misleading the public, which in turn creates a negative image for the opponent.

The second sub-category is *criticizing the other side's comments or attacks as being overly negative.* In theory, it is not deemed very suitable for a presidential hopeful to be overly negative in campaigning or in their performance otherwise as that can be seen as being overly political, which, as discussed before, is not a preferred feature in a president.

The point of view in this category is slightly different from category 4 discussed above, which dealt with the negativity of the strategy of campaigning. Here, in category 7, the criticism is on the attacks launched against the candidate and not the overall campaign strategy of the opponent.

8. Attacking the candidate's campaign success

This final strategy category deals with the campaign success of the opponent. In my analysis I do not concentrate on instances that talk about, for example, percentages of possible voters or very specific poll results. My focus is more on the performance of the candidates in the televised debates and for example on attacks against how successful the other side claims that their candidate is.

The first sub-category is *attacking the performance of the opponent in the debates.* During the final month of the race, there were three televised debates: two between Romney and Obama and one between their running mates Ryan and Biden.

The second sub-category includes *attacks and negative comments on the performance of the opponent during the overall campaign and on how successful the other side claims that their candidate has been in their campaign.* This deals with the overall performance of the opponent and these instances attempt to minimize the success that the opponent is saying that they enjoy.

4.2 My findings

In the following section, I present the findings of my analysis in detail. I begin with Romney's blog posts and then move on to Obama's blog. In each case, I go through my

findings one category and sub-category at a time, in the same order as I explained them above.

When I discuss my findings below and give percentages for how frequently a category is used, I always compare the number of posts that used a certain strategy to the total number of posts with **explicit** negativity published on that blog. Thus, the percentages that I present show how many posts out of the total number of posts with explicit negativity employed that strategy.

4.2.1 Romney

Mitt Romney is the challenger candidate and therefore it is to be expected that his blog will include plenty of negative instances targeted at his competitor, the incumbent Barack Obama. The challenger candidate in an election is usually more negative than the incumbent candidate as he must try to show why the incumbent has not done a good job and how electing him again would lead to bad things. The incumbent is more in a position of defense and his or her priority is to convince the voters of his or her competence and prove that he has done a good job.

During the one-month period that I am focusing on, Romney's blog included a variety of different types of texts. There were texts written by Romney himself, at least nominally, ones by his running mate Paul Ryan, campaign staff, some were written by "Team Romney", supporters of Romney, and a couple even by Romney's wife, Ann. In addition to these, a vast number of endorsements by different newspapers were posted on the blog in which the newspapers in essence officially state that they will back Romney in the race. These endorsements were published in the newspapers and often versions of these were presented in Romney's blog. Overall then, there was plenty of variety in the blog posts and thus different voices presented.

In Romney's blog, there were 151 blog posts (59% out of the total of 254 posts published on his blog) that contained explicit negativity towards Obama and that I included in my analysis. Below, I will deal with each strategy category individually and illustrate my findings with examples from my data. In each example, the bold font emphasis is added by me.

1. Attacking the candidate's policy positions, proposals, agenda, plans and solutions

Romney's blog posts included a great deal of negativity directed at Obama's policies, proposals, and plans. The number of instances with this kind of negativity was 206 during the period under analysis. 70% of the posts with explicit negativity included the use of this strategy (105 out of 151 posts). This is quite a high percentage and clearly this is a strategy that has been proven to be effective by the campaign team and thus used so often. This high usage of the strategy is quite natural as Romney is the challenger and an obvious way of campaigning for such a candidate is indeed to attack the policies that the opponent has promoted and the strategies and approaches he has had and still has as the sitting President.

The first, and one of the most used sub-categories in this strategy category is *criticizing the opponent's plans and proposals for the future*; or, as is often the case in Romney's attacks against Obama, the lack thereof. Below, Obama is criticized for allegedly not having an agenda for his second term as President. Thus, an image is being created of him as not qualified to be President, as he has no specific plans laid out for the future.

(1)   "The President's billion-dollar machine has resorted to petty attacks and empty rhetoric, because **they have no agenda for a second term.**"

In the second example below, once again, it is claimed that Obama does not have a plan for future times. This example is a version of a phrase that is very often repeated as an identical version or as only slightly modified. It seems that Romney's campaign team tries to make this sentence a mantra of sorts that will stick to voters' minds. In an election it is useful to devise such mantras that when repeated often, can elicit powerful negative imagery about the opponent. Additionally, the content of the mantra is very strong as it creates a very negative image for the President as someone without any merit and without any plans for the future.

(2)   "Barack Obama **doesn't have** a record to run on or **a plan for the future.**"

Below is an example of Romney's team criticizing specific policies that the President has laid out for the future. This instance tries to paint a worrying picture for voters about their financial future if the President gets reelected. This comes down to the specifics, and the added calculation creates an even more troublesome picture for the citizens. Naturally, it is important and effective for a candidate to attack the opponent's specific proposals or plans and to try to prove how bad they are. As Trent and Friedenberg (2000: 96) mention, the more

details a candidate presents about their plans, the more 'weaponry' they provide for the opposing side with which to attack.

(3)   "**Thanks to the President's new spending proposals,** middle-class families can now **look forward to a $4,000 annual tax increas**e."

The following instance shows more of the specific issues for which Obama has not laid out a plan according to Romney's team and that they find inadequate. Obama is shown as not being prepared to tackle issues that he will face in the future.

(4)   "They have **no ideas on how to reform and modernize our public institutions – our tax code, our entitlement programs, and our schools – in order to meet the challenges of the 21st century.**"

The second sub-category that I have placed in this category is *criticizing the approach or course of action that the opponent has taken in relation to something*. Below are a few examples of this sub-category in Romney's blog.

In the first example, Romney tries to show the harmful effects of Obama's chosen approach in the Western Hemisphere. By describing Obama's approach as "laid-back" and by saying that there has been a "lack of retribution" on Obama's part, an image of weakness is created. As Trent and Friedenberg (2000: 69) state, citizens have a certain image of an "ideal" candidate in their minds, and the candidates ought to try and match these expectations during their campaign. Typically, an ideal president is thought to be strong and powerful, and thus, by implying that the opposing candidate has behaved in quite the opposite way, a negative image is being created for him.

(5)   "During Obama's tenure, rogue regimes have re-aligned and feel emboldened by **the lack of retribution** for their power grabs and **Obama's laid-back approach in the Hemisphere.**"

In the example below, Obama's approach in missile defense and nuclear modernization are negatively described as timid; again a feature that is not commonly considered suitable or preferred in a president. Moreover, in addition to saying that the President has behaved in a fearful way, it is pointed out that this has made America and its allies less safe. Thus, the President's approach in these military issues is depicted not only as not powerful enough, but also as dangerous for the nation. Therefore, the blog post tries to make the point that the current President behaves in a harmful way.

(6) "Missile defense and nuclear modernization represent two critical components of America's military deterrent that prevent war and protect the American people. But in both of these areas**, President Obama's timid approach has made America and our allies less safe.**"

The following example also criticizes Obama's approach to rural America by painting it as "out-of-touch" and "counterproductive". Thus, Obama is depicted as not knowing what rural America needs. As with the previous examples, Obama's approach is described as harmful and it is emphasized that Romney would change this course of action and offer a better future in this way.

(7) "Romney will reverse **President Obama's out-of-touch and counterproductive approach** to rural America and instead champion the efforts of those who guarantee the safety and security of America's food supply, produce economic prosperity, and help to feed the world."

The third sub-category is *attacking the policies that the candidate has promoted or still promotes*. The challenger candidate naturally must attack the policies of the incumbent candidate because he needs to show the voters that the incumbent's policies have been harmful and that he will offer better policies if elected. This is one of the most powerful tools that the challenger has and a strategy that the incumbent cannot really employ. Romney attacked Obama's policies in the blog very often and so below are only a few examples of this sub-category.

One of the most recurring instances were ones in which Obama's policies, be they foreign policy decisions or domestic ones, were depicted as failures. This creates a very bad image for Obama, as failure is not something that voters want from their President.

(8) "Tonight offers us a very clear choice: **Four more years of failed policies and irresponsible spending**, or a new path leading to 12 million new jobs and a stronger middle class**.**"

(9) "We have a President with **failed economic policies** and millions of Americans out of work, but **rather than face the truth, he actually hurdles false attacks against Mitt Romney's job-creating record**, and he **continues to blame the Republicans after four years in office**."

By depicting Obama as a failed president, Romney tries to persuade the voters that a change is needed, and that he can bring it about.

Naturally, there are other ways to criticize the opponent's policies than claiming that they have failed. Romney's blog posts present a variety of ways that Obama's policies can be depicted in a negative light. In the example below, the President's decision to cut military spending is depicted as illogical and profound, implying that it was a harmful thing to do and that the decision was not wisely made.

(10)   "As commander-in-chief, I will roll back **the president's deep and arbitrary cuts to our military**."

Below, regulations made by the Obama administration are targeted by claiming that they have been very bad for the industry. The aim here is again to convince voters that the policies and decisions made by the President have been detrimental.

(11)   "I will re-visit **coal regulations that were designed by the administration to strangle the industry.**"

Another instance that belongs to this sub-category is presented below, and it criticizes the programs or policies that Obama has allegedly wasted money on. Thus, it is implied that Obama cannot pick the right targets for spending.

(12)   "**Trillions of dollars have been wasted on programs** such as 'stimulus' and bailouts of big businesses and irresponsible states."

The fourth sub-category is *attacking the positions, philosophies or "messages" that the candidate has and is promoting*. In the example below, Obama is criticized because he allegedly has not managed to deliver on the message and philosophy that he has emphasized in the past; namely, during his first bid for presidency when his entire campaign was focused on the ideas of 'hope' and 'change'. Again, a negative image is created for Obama as being a failure.

(13)   "**Instead of following through on his hope-and-change message**, Obama keeps telling us the limits of hope and change."

Below is an example where the political philosophy of Obama is being described very negatively. An image is painted of him as an arrogant know-it-all who thinks he knows what is best for everyone. Thus, an attack on his behavior and philosophy as a president is being made.

(14)   "That's because his political philosophy rests on a simple premise: **He thinks he knows how to spend your money better than you can.**"

Below is an example of a straightforward attack on the philosophical character of the opponent Obama.

(15)   "He is an ideologue who **pretends he is a pragmatist**."

In addition to the examples presented above, there are some instances that quite well target all of the sub-categories of this first strategy. The following example showcases this nicely.

(16)   "We are three weeks from the election, **and he has no new ideas, no proposals, no plans, no agenda, no strategy for creating jobs, for bringing down the unemployment rate, and for getting Americans back to work.**"

According to this particular instance, Obama has no policies or plans whatsoever and therefore the instance tries to show the voters this alleged shortage and thus convince them that this is not a competent candidate.

2. Attacking the personal/professional characteristics of the candidate, his values, views, and his integrity

The second strategy category of creating a negative image for the opponent deals with instances that attack his or her personal or professional characteristics and, for example, his or her values or worldviews. In Romney's blog, this strategy is used in 28% of all posts; out of 151 posts, there were 43 posts that employed this kind of strategy. Overall, I counted 103 instances of negativity of this kind.

The first sub-category in this strategy is *criticizing the opponent's behavior and character and depicting it as unpresidential, dishonest, and lacking integrity*. In the first example below, Obama is being accused of deceiving people, which is a very strong statement. In addition, the sentence implies that not only is the President being deceptive now, he has been that way before.

(17)   "The President is not only reverting to **pettiness, but also to deception.**"

Below, once again, the President and his campaign are accused of lying and distorting facts – serious claims to make about a nation's President. Again, there is a sense that this behavior is not new, but is being carried on from the past.

(18)   "We cannot allow his billion-dollar machine to win -- **and we can't allow them to continue to lie about and distort my record and plan.**"

In the instance below, the whole of Obama's campaign is judged as untruthful.

(19)   "Yet it is **difficult to recall a campaign less truthful than President Obama's in 2012**."

Obama is also accused of being misleading and aggressive in attacking Romney with false information. Obama is depicted as being forced to attack Romney as he does not have any merits or plans himself.

(20)   "Unfortunately, in the absence of a record or a plan to restore the strength of our nation's economy, **President Obama has resorted to misleading attacks about Romney's commitment to the automotive industry.**"

Clearly all of these instances that I have presented here try to build an image for Obama as untruthful, lying and misleading, and thus, not presidential. Below, the President's behavior, as well as his character and competence, are very heavily criticized. The sentence tries to tarnish Obama's presidency on the whole. The instance discusses Obama's campaign and the claims that he has made against Romney, for instance.

(21)   "**This admixture of pettiness and ugliness is a sign of a presidency** that is **intellectually exhausted, increasingly desperate, and unequal to this moment and the huge challenges we face.**"

The second sub-category is *attacking the opponent's values and worldviews*. By showing that Obama's values, for example, are not suitable for a president or are wrong in some way, a negative image can be built for him. Below, the sentence tries to make Obama seem cold-hearted and indifferent to people's suffering. He is being portrayed as not caring about people around the world.

(22)   "**The Obama administration has failed to lead and has remained blind to the challenges** in our own Hemisphere and **tone deaf to the suffering** of those under the iron grip of tyrannical rulers."

The sentence below is not written by Romney, but by a former Democratic Congressman for Ohio, but it still brings to people's attention and reminds them of such decisions that Obama has made that may be important to Catholic voters. Not only that, but also emphasizing the fact that the writer is a *Democrat*, the importance of this decision beyond party lines is given focus. Perhaps this instance tries to show voters that it is perfectly acceptable to vote beyond one's own party affiliation in case an issue of one's own party's candidate does not fit into one's own values.

(23)   "**As a Catholic Democrat, I was deeply disappointed by the Obama administration's decision** to force Catholic organizations and charities to pay for certain medical services that violate their faith."

3. Attacking the candidate's professional traits, leadership qualities, and competence

The third strategy category deals with the professional traits of the candidates, and so the negative instances that belong to this category attempt to create an image for the opponent as incompetent, unqualified and all in all unable to be the leader of the nation. In Romney's blog, 118 posts employed this strategy, which is 78 % of the total of 151 posts. In those 118 blog posts, there were an astonishing number of 368 instances of this kind of strategy used. This is an interesting finding and it can be said that at least Romney's team has found it an important strategy to attack the competence of Obama, which is very typical of a challenger candidate.

The first sub-category deals with *attacks against the competence of the opponent*, and the instances here attempt to show that the candidate's decisions and policies have been failures and even harmful. The first example below presents a view that Obama has directed the country in a completely wrong direction.

(24)   "President Obama has **lead us down a dismal road of high unemployment, uncontrolled spending, and no real solutions to the problems our country is faced with**."

Another example of trying to create a negative image for Obama by targeting his competence is presented below. The quote is from a newspaper endorsement and it bluntly states their opinion that Obama is not qualified enough to be President.

(25)   "But after reflecting on his four years in the White House, **we also don't think that he's the best qualified candidate** in this race."

Another example is given in the quote below, in which Obama's alleged failures as a whole are referred to, and at the same time he is compared to Romney, and it is stated that the things that are Obama's weaknesses are in fact Romney's strengths.

(26)   "Admittedly**, Obama's failures center mostly around domestic policy** — Romney's strength."

The second sub-category is comprised of *attacks against the leadership abilities of the opponent*. Below, the quote criticizes the leadership capabilities of Obama very strongly, and the criticism is given even more weight by referring to the human suffering that has been going on in a country where allegedly Obama has failed to show leadership. Naturally, one of the commonly held key characteristics that a president is supposed to have is the ability to be a good leader. Therefore, attacking this ability of the opponent is an important tool in trying to create a negative image for him.

(27)   **"The President has failed to lead in Syria**, where more than 30,000 men, women, and children have been massacred by the Assad regime over the past 20 months."

Another example of very clear criticism of Obama's leadership is presented below. Here, even though Obama's name is not mentioned, it is clear that American leadership here refers to him also, since he is the one with the most power in the American political system. The quote urges American citizens to notice the lack of leadership for themselves.

(28)   "If the American people want to see what **lack of American leadership abroad** looks like, they need only turn on their televisions to the evening news **over the past few months.**"

Attacking the competence and the ability to be a leader of the opponent are very effective strategies since competence for the job is, or at least should be, one of the most important

things, if not *the* most important thing, to consider when deciding on which candidate to vote for.

4. Attacking the strategy of the campaign, the business of campaigning, "dirty tricks", negative ads and campaigning

This fourth strategy category deals with instances that try to create a negative image for the opponent by launching attacks against the strategy of the opponent's campaign, for example by criticizing the opponent's negative adverts and campaigning style, "dirty tricks" that the opponent is allegedly using in his or her campaign, and the business side of campaigning. Out of the total of 151 blog posts with explicit negativity, 118 posts did not employ this strategy at all. Thus, only 33 posts included instances in which the actual strategy of campaigning is targeted. It is a comparatively small percentage (22%) and manifests that this has not been viewed as the best way to create negativity around the opponent. In these 33 blog posts, I found 57 instances of this strategy in use.

The first sub-category deals with *criticizing the negativity in the opponent's campaigning*. This includes ads, the strategy, attacks made by the opponent or so-called "dirty tricks". This is the sub-category that is used the most in Romney's blog. The first example below very directly states that Obama's campaign is lying and trying to mislead voters. The quote here offers a way for the voters to keep updated and to fight the alleged lies of Obama's campaign.

(29)   "Follow @RomneyResponse on Twitter to receive live updates and information you'll need to fight **the Obama campaign's distortions.**"

Another example in this sub-category is the one presented below which deals with criticizing the opponent because of his attacks against the other candidate.

(30)   "So the President has settled on a strategy of using **juvenile insults and name games against his opponent**."

The example above fits also into the second sub-category, which is *criticizing the opponent as campaigning in an unpresidential way*. The instances in this category deal with claiming that the opponent and his campaign team are not behaving in a way that is suitable for a

presidential candidate, let alone an incumbent President in Obama's case. What is perceived to be presidential behavior is for example being dignified, having integrity, and being respectful. Therefore trying to convince voters that the opponent behaves in an opposite way, and thus in an unpresidential way, can be a strong tool in creating a negative image for the opponent.

Another example in this sub-category is the one presented below. It tries to make Obama seem unpresidential by, for instance, criticizing his appearance on a daytime chat show "The View", and comparing that to his debate performance, which is also criticized in this instance. The quote also claims that Obama is not doing his job as President either, but instead spends his time attending TV shows.

(31)   "But I don't see Obama spending much time running the country, **unless you count his recent appearance on The View, where he was far more animated and charming than during the debate.**"

The above example also illustrates something that Trent and Friedenberg (2000: 88-90) discussed which is the importance for an incumbent to appear to be above political trenches and using surrogates to do the campaigning while himself attending to his tasks as President. This is what Romney's team is attacking in the example above since they claim that Obama is not doing his job as President, but is concentrating on trivial matters.

The next sub-category deals with *the business side of campaigning*. The two examples below try to tarnish the Obama campaign by making it seem like they are trying to buy the election by attacking Romney.

(32)   "The President's **billion-dollar machine has resorted to petty attacks and empty rhetoric,** because they have no agenda for a second term."

(33)   "They will use this money **to blanket battleground states with negative ads**."

The fourth sub-category concerns attacking the opponent by *criticizing the opponent's campaign strategy altogether*. Below is an example of this kind of strategy in use. It criticizes the Obama campaign strategy from all possible points of view, listing the negative attributes that they have found in it.

(34)   "The Obama campaign has therefore been reduced to running an almost entirely tactical campaign –
**sometimes trivial, sometimes rude, sometimes mocking, sometimes ugly, and sometimes
emotionally unsteady**"

The next example could be placed in nearly all of the sub-categories presented in this category. As I have already mentioned, it is true with many of the negative instances found in the blog posts that they indeed fit into several strategy categories and naturally also into more than one sub-category.

(35)   "It is **the childish culmination of a campaign run almost entirely on the fuel of small-minded
tactics and attacks** – from charging that Republicans want autistic and Down syndrome children to
"fend for themselves" and want to put African Americans "back in chains," to the Obama Super PAC
accusing Governor Romney of being responsible for the death of a steel worker's wife, to repeated
falsehoods about Governor Romney's record and agenda."

In fact, all of the examples that I have presented in this category were ones that I have placed in more than one strategy category in my analysis. Thus, one sentence in a blog post can include multiple ways of creating a negative image of the opposing candidate.

5. Attacking the candidate's past record and calling for change

This strategy is naturally a very important one because the main weapon in the challenger candidate's arsenal is in fact trying to show the voters that the current President has failed to do his job and that his term as President has been a failure, and therefore a change in leadership is needed; a change that this challenger can bring about. Thus, calling for change is another side of this strategy, as well as attacking the opponent's past record. There were only 22 blog posts out of the total of 151 that did not use this strategy at all. This means that 85 % of the blog posts in the one-month period did employ this way of creating a negative image for the opponent. Altogether there were 434 instances of this kind of negativity in the posts. Based on its extensive use, it is safe to say that this method has been deemed effective by Romney's team.

The first sub-category of this strategy is *attacking the opponent's past record*. The first example of this sub-category is presented below. In the quote, it is clearly stated that Obama has failed as President. This type of phrase of a failed record is often repeated in Romney's blog in various ways. Moreover, in this example, a contrast is made between the

failure of Obama and the alleged abilities of Romney. On countless occasions, Romney's blog offers as a fact that Obama has failed, and this sends an undeniably strong message.

(36)   "Mitt Romney will offer a stark contrast between his vision for a strong foreign policy and **the failed record of President Obama.**"

The next example points to failures in Obama's past record in terms of foreign policy as well as defense policies, according to Romney's team. Foreign policy and national defense are matters that are viewed as highly important in American politics. Therefore, to create a negative image for the opponent, it is logical to attack his or her capabilities when it comes to these issues.

(37)   "He has consistently **neglected our allies, misread our adversaries, and undermined our military readiness.**"

Below is another example that specifies the bad decisions and failures of Obama, according to Romney's team. It is naturally useful to be specific when attacking the past decisions of one's opponent to give the claims more weight.

(38)   "The presidential **gambit to place health-care reform ahead of economic recovery jeopardized both.**"

In this example, using the word "gambit" also gives the impression that Obama has acted in a risky way, which is not necessarily a good quality for the leader of a country to have.

Below is an example that is short and concise, yet powerful. It attempts to paint a picture of Obama's record as a failure and also as alarming.

(39)   "President Barack **Obama's record provides cause only for worry.**"

The examples below try to take a slightly softer approach by stating that Obama does not mean harm, but has failed nonetheless.

(40)   "President Obama is a well-intentioned man **whose policies have manifestly failed.**"

(41)   "President Obama has his heart in the right place, **but his policies simply have not worked for the country, and those failures have fallen particularly hard on the black community.**"

The next instance of this sub-category is an example that appears very often in the blog posts in this form or in a slightly varied form. This phrase very strongly negates the first term of Obama as President and states that it was a failure in every way and that the country cannot sustain another term, in other words four more years, of Obama at the helm. It takes the point of view that the country cannot survive another Obama term and that it would be almost dangerous to elect him again.

(42)   "We **can't afford four more years like the last four**."

Below, I list a few other occurrences of the type of instance shown above, because in my view, these kinds of instances were the most often repeated ones and thus perhaps the most significant phrases in Romney's attacks against Obama.

(43)   "We can't afford **four more years of empty promises and misguided policies.**"

(44)   "I stand by Governor Romney because **we cannot take four more years of weak leadership, overinflated government, and a president who believes that we can't change Washington.**"

(45)   "He showed America that on November 6th, there is a clear choice: **four more years of what we already know hasn't worked**, or a new path that leads to a real recovery."

In the last instance above, the same repetition of the last four years having been a failure is presented but this time it is compared with the option that Romney provides that "leads to a real recovery". This kind of juxtaposition is also very often found in Romney's blog, and naturally, trying to show the difference between him and Obama is a key method in convincing the readers of the blog to vote for Romney. In addition, the phrase "real recovery" is repeated time and again, and this is probably done in order to plant this idea into the voters' minds, as it is very concise and appealing. The instance below is another example of the comparison made between what Romney allegedly can offer and what Obama has failed in during his term as President.

(46)   "Tonight's debate is another opportunity for America to see the clear choice this election offers: Mitt Romney's commonsense solutions, **or four more years of President Obama's failed policies.**"

In this sub-category, another way of creating a negative image about the opponent's past record is to point out that the opponent does not have enough evidence in their past to merit their being elected President; in other words, they suffer from a lack of a record. Naturally, in Romney's blog this has been an often-used strategy. The example below is also one that keeps reoccurring in the blog posts, in one form or another.

(47)   "As evidenced in last night's debate, **the Obama-Biden campaign neither has a record to run on nor a plan for the future.**"

It is effective to say that Obama does not have a record to merit his re-election but also that he does not have a plan for future times. This combination of the past and the future is very frequently presented in the posts. In political campaigns, it is useful to coin phrases that easily stick to people's minds and then to keep repeating them.

The second sub-category is *blaming the opponent for breaking his or her promises*. Romney's team naturally attacks Obama from this angle, since stating that a president has broken his or her promises to voters is a very effective strategy to create a negative image for them. An image is created for this candidate as being untrustworthy; even though it is common knowledge that what is promised before an election often does not hold afterwards.

(48)   "He promised to be a "post-partisan president" but **he became the most partisan-- blaming, attacking, dividing.**"

Another example of this sub-category is presented below. This instance lists specific issues on which Obama has allegedly broken his promises. The claim is given more strength when a long list of failures is provided.

(49)   "**He has fallen far short of virtually every important promise he made** – whether it has to do with job creation, economic growth, cutting the deficit in half, cutting health care costs, moving America toward energy independence, or improving America's relations with the Arab and Islamic world."

The third sub-category is *minimizing the accomplishments of the opponent*. The example below illustrates this. While it is acknowledged that there has been some progress, the main point in the quote is that there has not been enough of it, and so the overall sentiment of the sentence is very negative. One cannot negate everything the other candidate has achieved in the past, but one must try to minimize the importance of those successes as much as possible.

(50) "Under President Obama, **there's been almost no progress** in improving the quality of education, college tuitions are up 25%, student debt has topped $1 trillion, and half of recent college graduates are unable to find a job matching their skills or any job at all."

6. Showing how electing the candidate would lead to or create a bad future

This strategy concerns instances that attempt to convince voters that electing the opponent would lead to a bad future and hard times. The aim is to say that it would be harmful or even dangerous to elect the opponent and that the opponent would implement bad policies and make terrible decisions. In my analysis, I found that 52% of the posts in Romney's blog included this type of strategy. There were 144 instances of negativity of this kind. This is an important strategy as well since it is vital for the candidate to show that if the opponent is elected, it will lead to a bad future, unlike with the sponsor candidate.

The first sub-category of this strategy is *trying to convince voters that the opponent would make bad decisions and implement harmful policies*. The examples below attempt to show how, if elected, Obama would continue with his bad policies, and thus enforcing the idea that they have indeed been bad policies, and how electing him would lead to a gloomy future.

(51) "Another term in the White House will yield **even more of the same failed policies, higher taxes and more regulations that are stifling economic growth**."

(52) "We cannot re- elect a president who has had precious little success when it comes to creating jobs and **who is now promising to double-down on failed policies if he is re-elected.**"

The second sub-category is *trying to show that the opponent does not have a plan for the future*, and thus emphasizing the uncertainty and riskiness of choosing to vote for the opponent. The examples below illustrate this sub-category.

(53) "**President Obama has not put forward a vision for the future** and his record over the course of the last four years has resulted in chronic unemployment, increased poverty and greater dependence on government."

(54) "Barack Obama doesn't have a record to run on or **a plan to get our country moving on the right track.**"

The third sub-category is *trying to convince the voters that electing the opponent will be dangerous and lead to harmful things*. These instances truly attempt to appeal to emotions. Below are a few examples of this sub-category.

(55)   "But **his reckless spending will cause real pain to real people.**"

(56)   "Runaway domestic spending has led the president to propose reducing defense spending by hundreds of billions, cuts that his own secretary of defense has said **would "devastate" our national security.**"

(57)   "In a second term, he will take our national debt past $20 trillion**, a frightening figure that we will eventually have to pay off**."

(58)   "President Obama's government-centered vision of America means **we, as individuals, will have less control over our own lives.**"

As I have discussed already before, in Romney's blog, there is a specific phrase that keeps appearing in the blog posts, and which belongs also to this sub-category. It is the phrase "can't afford", as in saying that America and its people cannot afford another term of Obama's leadership. There are multiple variations of this phrase, and perhaps it resonates with the public especially as the economic climate during the election was quite gloomy, and so by saying that America "can't afford" another term with Obama at the helm brings the sentiment closer to the public's own lives and closer to their own use of language and thus makes it more understandable and relatable to them. Below, I give a few examples of this phrase in use. They all paint a picture that reelecting Obama would lead an unsustainable future.

(59)   "Americans **can't afford** a rerun of the last four years."

(60)   "With 23 million people struggling for work, and nearly one in six Americans living in poverty, **we can't afford to give President Obama another chance to get it right.**"

7. Attacking the attacks that the opponent has made and pointing out the falsity of the claims made

This strategy category has to do with attacking or criticizing the attacks that the opponent's side is launching against the other candidate. These instances try to show that the attacks are false and misleading and also they try to make the other side seem excessively negative for example in their ads. Out of all of the 151 posts on Romney's blog, 15% included this strategy. There were 36 instances of this strategy being used altogether. Thus, this was not a very central strategy in Romney's campaign.

The first sub-category is *claiming that the other side's attacks are lies and contain false information*. Below are a few examples of this sub-category in use.

(61)   "The President re-proposes policies that have already proven ineffective and **repeats discredited allegations against Governor Romney.**"

(62)   "In other words, it's not simply that **President Obama's entire premise about Governor Romney shifting his positions is false**; it's that **the President is persistently misleading the public** even as he (falsely) criticizes Governor Romney for misleading the public."

(63)   "We cannot allow his billion-dollar machine to win -- **and we can't allow them to continue to lie about and distort my record and plan.**"

The second sub-category is *criticizing the other side's comments or attacks as being overly negative*. The examples below illustrate this sub-category in use.

(64)   "**Mr. Obama is mocking a small effort to reduce federal spending**, but it would be funnier if Mr. Obama hadn't also rejected all the larger efforts too."

(65)   "In fact, the only area in which the President dominated was on **who spent more time attacking his opponent**."

(66)   "Coupled with **the negative tenor of the campaign**, that merely confirms the president and his strategists felt that attacking Romney's agenda was more politically expedient than releasing one of their own."

Example 65 above is a great example of campaign rhetoric and the fact that often things offered as facts in campaigns are not true, as my research clearly demonstrates Romney as being the candidate who is more negative and who has spent more time attacking the opponent. However, it is important for a candidate to try and make the opponent seem unfair and misleading, and as such, unpresidential, even though it is clear that both candidates attack

the other side. Still, trying to maintain an image as having integrity himself and of being falsely accused by the opponent is a significant thing to do in a campaign in terms of image building for the candidate himself, as well as for the opponent.

8. Attacking the candidate's campaign success

This was not a very often-used strategy in Romney's blog. In my analysis, 15% of all of the blog posts analyzed included this strategy. In total, there were 43 instances of negativity of this kind.

The first sub-category is *attacking the performance of the opponent in the debates*. These are assessments of how well the opposing candidate did in the debate and so it is an overall assessment of his success in it. I present a few cases of this below.

(67)   "**I have never seen a performance worse than Obama's**, distracted, his head dipped into the podium as if avoiding the smell of something rotten, acting above the very idea that a debate does provide a pivotal referendum on his first term as it has for all incumbent presidents, whipsawed by the legion of usual advisers telling him to play defense when his own intuition should have told him that he needed to go on the offensive as Romney slapped him around."

In the first example above, a strikingly harsh evaluation is given about Obama's debate performance, as being unique in its inferiority. The quote is from an article written by Buzz Bissiner, an author, and he is what we can call a surrogate speaker. As discussed previously, these kinds of harsh personal attacks are often best left to these surrogate speakers to avoid tarnishing the sponsor candidate's image.

(68)   "**The President seems incapable of processing his failures** or the fact that Governor **Romney bested him in their debate series**."

(69)   "Our memory of a euphoric Obama who energized this country four years ago is now replaced by **the picture of a slumping president, tired and defensive, during his first debate with Romney.**"

The second sub-category includes *attacks and negative comments on the performance of the opponent during the overall campaign and on how successful the other side claims that their candidate has been in their campaign*. Often in these cases there is some comparison with the performance of the candidate who is launching the attack.

(70)   "He ends this campaign as **a dramatically diminished figure**"

(71)   "**The President's campaign falls far short** of the magnitude of the times."

(72)   "So even though the billion-dollar Obama juggernaut wants to crow that Romney-Ryan momentum is a myth, **they have nowhere near the numbers they need to position themselves for victory on Election Day**."

(73)   "**The Obama campaign wants you to believe they're outperforming us** -- but the reality is they aren't."

Summary of findings

In my analysis of the posts in Romney's blog, I found that the amount of negativity against Obama was quite substantial and the negativity was often quite harsh. It became very clear that the overwhelmingly most-used strategy categories were attacking the candidate's policy positions, proposals, agenda, plans, and solutions (category 1), attacking the candidate's professional traits, leadership qualities, and competence (category 3), and attacking the candidate's past record or calling for change (category 5). This became evident by the sheer number of instances of these strategies being used. There were 206 instances of strategy number 1, 368 instances of strategy number 3 and 434 instances of strategy number 5.

In my view, these kinds of findings were to be expected since Romney was the challenger candidate and it is imperative for a challenger to show voters why the incumbent has done a poor job as President and why they are not competent for the task, as well as calling for a change which they themselves can actualize. For example, out of all of the posts that had explicit negativity towards Obama, 85% included attacks against Obama's past record as President. That is a significant amount, but indeed follows the logic of a challenger candidate's campaign. It also manifests the duty of the challenger as the one who is expected to point out what the person in power has done wrong, which is something that Geer (2006: 95) also mentioned. Therefore it is quite natural for there to be this kind of emphasis on attacks regarding the past actions of the incumbent.

The next most-used strategies in Romney's bog posts were attacking the values, views and integrity of Obama (category 2) and showing how electing Obama would lead to a bad future (category 6). Strategy number 2 was used in 103 instances, whereas 144 instances used

strategy number 6. Accentuating the alleged bleak future that electing Obama again would lead to, is important for the challenger Romney as his main agenda is to convince voters that the status quo needs to be altered and the country to be taken in another direction in the future. Moreover, attacking the integrity and values of the opponent, I would suggest, is a common strategy for both the incumbent and the challenger, since voters do make decisions also based on the perceived honesty and values of the candidates.

What was interesting to see was the overall tone of the negativity in Romney's blog. Even though I did not conduct any profound research on the tone of the criticism per se, it became evident that the attacks made against Obama were sometimes very harsh in tone.

4.2.2 Obama

Barack Obama is the incumbent candidate and is therefore inherently in a more secure position than the challenger candidate Romney. In my analysis, I found that there is far less negativity in Obama's blog than in Romney's, and there can be several reasons for this. One is naturally the fact that Obama already has some credentials as President and thus does not have to try and undermine the other candidate as much and be as aggressive as the challenger. Another reason can be the fact that the incumbent candidate must act according to his or her position as President; he has to behave in a more dignified manner as they are in such a high and respected position. As previously mentioned, Trent and Friedenberg (2000: 88-89) also state that the incumbent tries to show himself as being above politics, and therefore being overly negative towards the opponent might be seen as being mired in political battle and this could be viewed as unpresidential behavior.

Overall, there were 63 blog posts in Obama's blog during the one-month period that included explicit negativity against Romney, which amounts to 21% out of the total of 303 posts published on his blog. That is a significantly smaller number than in Romney's blog which was 151 posts, or 59% out of the total number of posts.

1. Attacking the candidate's policy positions, proposals, agenda, plans, and solutions

In Obama's blog, there were in total 38 posts that employed this strategy of creating a negative image for the opponent. This means that 60% of all of the analyzed posts used this strategy. In these 38 posts, there were 106 instances of this strategy being used. Below, I illustrate the use of this strategy with a few examples.

The first sub-category is *criticizing the opponent's plans and proposals for the future*. This is probably one of the most important strategies for an incumbent candidate to employ because he cannot attack the opponent's past policies as effectively as their plans for the future. In addition, it is important for the incumbent to show the voters how the opponent's future plans as President would be harmful for the country, and meanwhile why the incumbent's plans would be good. Below, the instance criticizes the overall plan that Romney and his running mate have laid out.

(74)   "Knowing how the **Romney-Ryan plan could repeal all the progress we have made** terrifies me."

This particular quote was written by an Obama supporter, and so it reflects the views that some citizens have about the opponent's plans. The following example criticizes the alleged lack of plans or solutions that Romney presents concerning a certain issue.

(75)   "Meanwhile, Mitt Romney **didn't offer a single policy or solution** when asked about the problem of pay discrimination, just anecdotes."

The next example criticizes Romney's plans and how they are allegedly misleading.

(76)   "Romney **claimed he will bring jobs back to America, but his plans to eliminate taxes on American companies' foreign profits would actually encourage outsourcing."**

The following example is taken from a post that describes a televised debate and what Obama said there. It very straightforwardly criticizes Romney's plans and programs that he has proposed by calling them "sketchy"; that makes them seem dishonest.

(77)   "And he pointed out that Mitt Romney is offering the American people a **"sketchy deal**" in the form of a plan to spend $5 trillion giving the wealthy a tax cut they don't need and $2 trillion on a defense build-up the Pentagon says it doesn't want—all without explaining how he'd pay for it."

The second sub-category that I dealt with in relation to Romney's blog was *criticizing the approach or course of action that the opponent has taken in relation to something*. However, there were no instances of this exact type of negativity towards Romney in Obama's blog. One possible reason for this is that there is not as much such material to criticize in Romney's

case as he has not been president before, and therefore there is not so much to attack in terms of approaches Romney has taken.

The third sub-category is *attacking the policies that the opponent has promoted or still promotes*. Obama can attack the policies that Romney has promoted for example when he was the governor of Massachusetts, or the policies that he is promoting during the election campaign. Below, the instances try to convince voters that the policies put forth by Romney would be very harmful if implemented.

(78)   "Many, many people will be negatively affected if Mitt Romney is allowed to implement **his extreme policies.**"

(79)   "The Cold War has been over for 20 years, but, **Governor, when it comes to our foreign policy, you seem to want to import the foreign policies of the 1980s, just like the social policies of the 1950s and the economic policies of the 1920s."**

The example above is taken from a blog post that discusses the final presidential debate and the above sentence is something that Obama said to Romney. This quote appears in the blog posts a few times in slightly varied forms, probably because it is quite a catchy way of claiming that Romney's policies are outdated. Below is another example of criticizing Romney's policies.

(80)   "But Romney plans to take us back to the **failed policies of the past on more than just foreign policy."**

Below, the example tries to illustrate how Romney's policy stance related to health care would be dangerous and harmful.

(81)   "The opposition has **promised to do away with the Affordable Care Ac**t and leave us at the mercy of drug and insurance companies."

The fourth sub-category is *attacking the positions, philosophies or "messages" that the candidate has and is promoting*. As I have mentioned previously, in a political system with virtually only two parties, the differences in values and positions on certain issues can be traditionally quite contrary to each other, if we make a broad generalization. Therefore, it is a useful tool for candidates of different parties to criticize those opposing stances on value issues that the opponent might have. Obama is known to be fairly liberal on his values, and

Romney rather more conservative. This type of division is stereotypically made between Democrats and Republicans in general, as well. The example below shows Obama attacking Romney's values concerning women's rights on abortion.

(82) "This week, Romney attempted to hide **his extreme positions on a woman's right to choose.**"

Below is another example of criticism against Romney's philosophy on economic issues. It does not merely criticize his ideas of today, but of his past as well.

(83) "He has a one-point plan, and that plan is to make sure that folks at the top play by a different set of rules. **That's been his philosophy in the private sector, that's been his philosophy as governor, that's been his philosophy as a presidential candidate.**"

2. Attacking the personal/professional characteristics of the candidate, his values, views, and his integrity

There were 37 blog posts that included instances of this strategy being used to criticize Romney; in other words 59% out of all of the posts with explicit negativity. There were 92 instances of this type of strategy in use. The first sub-category in this strategy is *criticizing the opponent's behavior and character and depicting it as unpresidential, dishonest, and lacking integrity*. Obama has to try to show the voters that Romney's behavior is unsuitable for a President and is not dignified. In the example below, among other things, Romney is depicted as acting very arrogantly, "talking trash" about the citizens of America behind their back, so to speak, which of course is something that a President must not do.

(84) "The only way someone like Mitt Romney—who gets fact-checked by his own campaign on his health care plan, thinks Sesame Street deserves tougher treatment than Wall Street, and **wrote off half of the country when he thought no one was listening**—beats someone like Barack Obama is if you and I don't step it up when it really matters."

What the above example is referring to is an incident where Romney in a fundraising event, not knowing that he was filmed, was basically saying that 47% of Americans are just freeloading on government benefits. Naturally, this became a huge scandal during the election and Obama's campaign team took full advantage of the incident.

Characteristics that are highly important for a presidential nominee are being honest and truthful. Thus, trying to convince voters that the opposite is true in relation to the opponent is an imperative goal for a candidate. The example presented below attacks Romney's running mate, and thus by extension Romney himself. There are many similar instances found in the blog calling Ryan a liar and false.

(85)   "From the **casual fib** to the **flat-out falsehood**, Paul Ryan has earned reviews like "false" and "four pinocchios" from independent fact-checkers."

Another example of Ryan being under attack is presented below. It unequivocally blames him of purposefully hiding the truth, which is not a light accusation.

(86)   "At the vice presidential debate, Rep. Paul Ryan **hid the truth** about how the Romney-Ryan budget would hurt the middle class."

Below, the attack is on Romney himself as being misleading and untruthful and thus presenting characteristics that are less than favorable.

(87)   "Romney misfired on his attacks, and at times **was caught in his own misleading statements.**"

(88)   "On immigration, Romney tried **disavow his promise** that he will veto the DREAM Act if it lands on his desk as president."

In several posts there were references to "the real Mitt Romney" as opposed to what he allegedly tries to portray himself to be. This attempts to create an image for Romney as not being truthful to the voters and pretending to be something he is not; obviously features one does not want to have in a public servant. The following examples illustrates this:

(89)   "Campaigning in Florida, President Obama talked about **the difference between the real Mitt Romney, and the Mitt Romney we saw in the first debate.**"

(90)   "In both the first presidential debate and the week since, **Mitt Romney has tried to convince the American people he's someone other than the "severely conservative" candidate who has spent the past six years running for president on dangerous ideas that would hurt the middle class, women and seniors.**"

The second sub-category is *attacking the opponent's values and worldviews*. Below is a title of a blog post that very harshly attacks Romney's views and values, as interpreted by the Obama camp. In the post, there are references to Romney's remarks in a debate about women's rights and about equal pay, for instance, and the title of the post reflects the content.

(91)   "Mitt Romney's **condescending views toward women.**"

Another example of attacking Romney's values and attitudes towards women is presented below. These kinds of accusations are very strong, but criticizing the opponent's value system, or the perceived value system, is a very effective strategy when trying to tarnish the image of the opponent. It is even more effective when these negative statements are juxtaposed with positive ones of the candidate making the attacks.

(92)   "While the President talked about women as breadwinners, **Romney talked about them as resumes in "binders".**"

Below is a quote from *Washington Post* that was published on Obama's blog after a debate. It strongly criticizes Romney's view of the world.

(93)   "Obama pressed his case that **Romney's worldview** as well as his prescriptions for the domestic front were not just wrong but also **rooted in the past.**"

3. Attacking the candidate's professional traits, leadership qualities, and competence

All in all, there were 18 posts that included this strategy in Obama's blog, which is 29% out of the total of the posts with explicit negativity. Overall, there were 59 separate instances of negativity of this kind used.

The first sub-category in this third strategy deals with *attacks against the competence of the opponent*. The first example criticizes Romney's competence and ability to be President by making him seem unsure of his own opinions and positions on some issues. The term that is used in the quote, "Romnesia", appears quite often in the blog posts, probably due to its catchiness. As I have discussed previously, it is a good tool in a presidential race to coin these kinds of terms or phrases that stick to people's minds and that can be used effectively throughout the race.

(94)   "Today in Fairfax, Virginia, President Obama diagnosed Mitt Romney with a severe case of "Romnesia," **a condition that conveniently makes the Governor forget his own positions on the issues**."

Below, the example tries to paint a picture of Romney as an uncertain and incompetent candidate who is not equipped to be President. The quote discusses his debate performance.

(95)   "Governor Romney was all over the map, **with an unclear and uncertain performance that showed once again he is not ready to be commander in chief.**"

The example below is taken from the New York Times but published in the blog and it discusses Romney's performance in a debate and it presents Romney as being incompetent.

(96)   **""On foreign policy,** the subject of Monday night's final presidential debate, **[Mitt Romney] had little coherent to say and often sounded completely lost.**""

The second sub-category found in use in Obama's blog is *attacks against the leadership abilities of the opponent*. The example below targets Romney's leadership capabilities and readiness to be President, or the lack thereof.

(97)   "Every time Romney's **had a chance to demonstrate he's ready to represent America on the world stage, he's failed.**"

Additionally, below is an instance that fits into both of the sub-categories presented above. As I have noted previously, this is quite typical of the instances dealt with above. Even though they are presented in a specific strategy category or sub-category does not mean that they do not fit into the other categories as well.

(98)   "No matter how many times he tries to articulate his reckless and clumsy foreign policy, **Romney has already failed the commander-in-chief test.**"

4. Attacking the strategy of the campaign, the business of campaigning, "dirty tricks", negative ads and campaigning

Overall, in Obama's blog, there were 28 posts that used this strategy to create a negative image for Romney and that is 44% of all of the posts. There were 58 instances of this kind of

negativity. The first sub-category in this strategy is *criticizing the negativity in the opponent's campaign strategy*. This is part of trying to portray oneself as being more dignified than the opponent, not stooping down to overly negative attacks like the other candidate. The instances below very clearly illustrate this sub-category. They all target the perceived overkill in negativity in the adverts of the other side.

(99)　　"We're about to get hit with **an avalanche of negative ads**."

(100)　　"That's been the other side's strategy from the beginning: **slamming the airwaves with ads trashing the President and his record**."

(101)　　"We cannot let our years of hard work be **obliterated in the end by an assault of desperate TV ads.**"

The second sub-category is *criticizing the opponent as campaigning in an unpresidential way*. Below is an example of this. The sentence tries to create an extremely controversial image of the opposing side by claiming that they are basically deliberately lying and being dishonest; both characteristics that are not desirable for a president to have.

(102)　　"I can't predict if Paul Ryan will follow Mitt Romney's lead tonight, **hiding and flat-out denying** their unpopular ideas, or if he'll come prepared to have a real debate about where this country should go."

Below is another example of this sub-category in use. It tries to emphasize the calculated nature of the alleged attempt to fool the voters about who Romney really is. This seems to be a kind of a common thread in Obama's posts about Romney. They attempt to build an image of Romney as not being what he says he is and of being false in every way. This way, Obama tries to show voters that Romney cannot be trusted.

(103)　　"These are not flip-flops—they are **deliberate attempts to hide the real Mitt Romney to win an election.**"

Below is another instance emphasizing the undignified way in which Romney is campaigning, the way that he is being very political, which, as was pointed out previously, is a feature that is not appreciated in a president and it is much more preferred if she or he stays above the political trenches so to speak.

(104)　　"Watch this video to see how Romney's attempts to **score cheap political points** fell flat."

The third sub-category is *attacking the business side of campaigning*. The example below criticizes Romney's campaign for trying to "buy" the victory with money, and thus for playing the game in an undignified way.

(105)   "I'll be blunt: **They are trying to buy this election**, and we're the only ones who are standing in their way."

Below is another example of this strategy; it also emphasizes the amount of money that Romney's campaign is using to attack Obama.

(106)   "In two days, when I shake Paul Ryan's hand onstage before the vice presidential debate, **his side will be halfway through a $23 million week-long ad blitz attacking Barack in 10 battleground states**."

The fourth sub-category is *criticizing the opponent's campaign strategy altogether*. The instance below is a good example of this. It tries to show voters how undignified the strategy of Romney is.

(107)   "When he's dealing with **a full-blown apparatus dedicated to tearing him and his agenda down and nothing else**, he can't go it alone."

The example below criticizes the overall strategy of Romney's campaign, as Obama's team, and the *Washington Post*, sees it.

(108)   "As the Washington Post puts it: "Republican nominee Mitt Romney and his allies are banking heavily on a high-risk, high- reward media strategy in the final weeks of the campaign, **hoping that burying President Obama in ads will give them a crucial edge on Election Day**.""

Below is another example that attacks the overall strategy the Romney campaign seems to have chosen.

(109)   "**The Republicans are throwing everything but the kitchen sink at him**, but we are truly grassroots, we believe in canvassing and phonebanking and our ground game is what's going to take us across the finish line."

5. Attacking the candidate's past record or calling for change

There were only 14 blog posts that included the use of this strategy, which is 22% out of all of the posts with explicit negativity. Overall, there were 30 instances of this kind of negativity in the posts. Comparing this number to Romney's blog, one notices a momentous difference. In Romney's blog, 85% of the posts during the one-month period included the use of this strategy. This very clearly illustrates the difference in position that the incumbent and the challenger candidate have in an election. It is much easier for the challenger to attack the incumbent's past record than the other way around, since the challenger does not yet have any record as a president. However, the incumbent can attack the past record of the challenger in his or her other posts.

The first sub-category in this strategy is *attacking the opponent's past record*. As Obama cannot attack Romney's record as President, he can target Romney's past record, for example, as Governor of Massachusetts or some other office he has held previously. Below is the first example of this sub-category.

(110)   "Watch Bay State legislators explain why **Romney "was not an effective governor.""**

Below is another criticism of Romney's past record, which allegedly has been unsuccessful.

(111)   "While President Obama has been a strong and steady leader who's made America safer and more secure than we were four years ago, **Romney has nothing to offer but a record or blunders and a commitment to endless war.**"

The instance below criticizes Romney's governing style of the past claiming that he has been very inconsistent. In addition, the instance attacks Ryan and his values and political views.

(112)   "**While Mitt Romney has wandered all over the spectrum from conservative to liberal in his governing style,** there can be no doubt that **Paul Ryan is a staunch conservative** who will do his best to influence the administration to curve sharply to the right if they are elected."

The next example refers to the problems that the American auto-industry had previously and what Romney had proposed as a solution to it, and criticizing his views on the issue.

(113)   "**He wanted to take them into bankruptcy** without providing them any way to stay open, and **we would have lost a million jobs.**"

The example below illustrates the attacking of Romney's past record as governor; one of the few main things Obama is able to attack in Romney's professional past.

(114)   "Romney tried to tout a record of "bipartisanship," **but the facts show that Romney hardly ever reached across the aisle as governor.**"

In Obama's blog, I could only find this type of negativity concerning Romney's past record. There were no instances criticizing Romney breaking his promises or minimizing his accomplishments, as was the case in Romney's blog about Obama's record. This again is due to the fact that Romney is the challenger and has never been in the same position as Obama, and thus the things that Obama can criticize about Romney are different than the other way around.

6. Showing how electing the candidate would lead to or create a bad future

There were all in all 25 blog posts that employed this strategy of creating a negative image fro the opponent, and that adds up to 40% of all of the posts during the period under analysis. All in all, I found 41 separate instances of this type of negativity being used in the posts. Both Obama and Romney used this strategy to almost the same extent; 52% of Romney's posts used this strategy as opposed to Obama's 40%.

The first sub-category in this strategy is *trying to convince voters that the opponent would make bad decisions and implement harmful policies*. The first instance is taken from a blog post that is written by an Obama supporter and often these types of texts are used to spread worry among voters about the future if the opponent is elected.

(115)   "I don't want health insurance to be the reason that I can't achieve my career goals, **but that will be the reality if Romney wins in November.**"

The next example discusses the vice presidential debate and at the same time attacks the plans that Romney and Ryan have.

(116)   "Congressman Paul Ryan had his chance to explain the Romney-Ryan plan to voters, but time and again he offered **vague, empty promises rather than confronting the real impact their ideas would have on the middle class.**"

Below is an example that paints a less than flattering picture of Romney's policies. This refers to policies of the past that have not worked and back to which Romney according to Obama wants to take the country.

(117)   "A foreign policy that's wrong and reckless, **economic policies that won't create jobs, won't reduce our deficit, but will make sure that folks at the very top don't have to play by the same rules that you do.'"**

The second sub-category is *trying to convince the voters that electing the opponent will be dangerous and lead to harmful things*. The examples below quite blatantly assert that the future would be bleak if Romney were elected.

(118)   "We can't **derail this progress by electing Romney.**"

(119)   **"**Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan would **roll back decades of progress for women and families**."

(120)   "**We fear what would happen** should Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan get elected."

The example below not only attacks Romney and creates an image of a bad future if he would be elected, but also juxtaposes that with Obama's plans and the future that he allegedly can create. This is an effective strategy.

(121)   "**While Romney is committed to going backward,** the President has a clear, detailed roadmap to build a strong economy from the middle class out."

Unlike in Romney's blog, in Obama's, there were no instances that claimed that Romney does not have a plan at all. There was only criticism about the plans that Romney and Ryan have put forth. Perhaps it is clear that the challenger will have plans for the future since they want to change the status quo, and thus it might be easier to criticize the incumbent candidate of not having a plan because he may be more easily argued to be relying on his record as President and staying the course.

7. Attacking the attacks that the opponent has made and pointing out the falsity of the claims made

Overall, there were 14 posts that included the use of this strategy, which is 22% of the total number of the posts. There were 20 instances of this kind of strategy in use. In Romney's blog, 15% of the posts included the use of this strategy, and thus this is one of the few strategies of which Obama's blog has more instances than Romney's.

The first sub-category in this strategy is *claiming that the other side's attacks are lies and contain false information.* The first example below illustrates this by claiming that Ryan attacked Obama by using false information in the vice presidential debate. Naturally it is important to defend oneself when the other side is attacking with certain claims.

(122)   "Asked about Medicare, Ryan repeated the same Republican attack on the President's record **that has been "repeatedly debunked" by independent fact-checkers.**"

A couple of other examples of claiming that the other side is falsely attacking Obama are presented below.

(123)   "In Iowa, Mitt Romney told a **series of falsehoods about the President's plan for rural America.**"

(124)   "Romney also brazenly ignored the facts and **falsely attacked President Obama on the attacks in Libya that killed four Americans.**"

The next example directly addresses the often seen claims in Romney's blog about Obama not having a record to run on, and of which there are examples in my analysis of Romney's blog.

(125)   "Every now and again, the other side **likes to claim President Obama doesn't have a record to run on. They're wrong.**"

The second sub-category is *criticizing the other side's comments or attacks as being overly negative.* The following instance is a good example of this in use.

(126)   "As a result, he's stooping to desperate attacks, bluffing about momentum he doesn't have, and **releasing one of the most misleading, hypocritical, and indefensible ads we've ever seen in a presidential race.**"

The final example of this sub-category is a clear example of Obama's team accusing Romney's side of being overly negative.

(127)   "We have more than 4 million people who own a piece of this campaign, and the other side wants to straight-up buy this election from under your feet with a few big checks, and **flood the airwaves with negative ads that distort the President's record and attack his character outright."**

8. Attacking the candidate's campaign success

All in all, only seven posts employed this strategy, which is only 11% out of all of the posts with explicit negativity. Clearly this strategy is very little used, and thus not deemed an effective strategy. There were overall 12 instances of this kind of negativity. In Romney's blog, 15% of the posts included the use of this strategy, and thus the use of it was quite equal between the candidates. All in all, this strategy is not deemed very important by either side as it is used to such a limited extent.

The first sub-category in this strategy contains *attacking the performance of the opponent in the debates*. Below, I present a few examples of this type of negative image creation.

(128)   "Meanwhile, **Mitt Romney didn't offer a single policy or solution** when asked about the problem of pay discrimination, just anecdotes."

 (129)   ""**Congressman Ryan's low point** happened near the end of the debate ... when he was asked about abortion.""

The second sub-category involves *attacks and negative comments on the performance of the opponent during the overall campaign and on how successful the other side claims that their candidate has been in their campaign*. The instances below illustrate the use of this strategy in Obama's blog.

(130)   "Romney, on the other hand, is not where he wanted to be eight days out: **down everywhere he needs to be up."**

(131)   "The Romney campaign, of course, wants you to think they're expanding the map. **They're not—and we're calling their bluff."**

(132)   "To borrow a phrase from **a nervous Republican consultant** talking in Florida this week about our turnout success, **we're cleaning the other guys' clock.**"

Summary of findings

My findings about the negativity towards Romney in Obama's blog followed the presumed lines of an incumbent candidate's campaign. As I have pointed out earlier, the incumbent candidate is typically less negative in their campaign than the challenger. They need to prove why the opponent could not perform better as President and why electing the opponent would lead to bad things. They are in a stronger position to begin with and therefore there is less need to attack the other side. Moreover, being overly negative is not suitable for a president as has been discussed previously.

Overall, my findings suggest that there was a significant difference in the amount of negativity between the two candidates, and Obama's blog turned out to be the more positive one. In Obama's blog, the two most-used strategies in terms of number of instances found were attacking the policies, plans and agenda of Romney (category 1) and attacking the personal/professional characteristics, values and integrity of Romney (category 2). There were in total 106 instances of the first strategy and 92 instances of the second. An interesting finding as compared with Romney's blog was that 59% of the posts with explicit negativity towards Romney included the use of this strategy of criticizing the personal/professional characteristics of the opponent and his values and integrity, (category 2), whereas in Romney's blog this strategy was used only in 28% of the posts. With respect to the number of instances of this strategy in use, there is almost the same number – Obama's blog had 92 instances and Romney's had 103 instances.

However, the amount of negative posts altogether is very different between the two as Obama's blog had 63 and Romney had 151 posts all in all. Therefore, it can be said that the use of this strategy in Obama's blog was much more frequent than in Romney's. Employing this strategy is especially suitable for the incumbent candidate to use, as the challenger is in a way a new face that has to define himself and his values and views etc. for the citizens. Obama on the other hand had served as President for four years already and people were more aware of his values and his character. Thus, I would argue that this is one reason for the more frequent use of the strategy against Romney than the other way around: for Obama, it is perhaps easier to employ this angle. This being said, this strategy includes criticism of the

integrity and personal characteristics of the opponent more generally, and the opponent can naturally find many things to attack in the incumbent as well. But perhaps as a well-known persona, the incumbent is more equipped to use this strategy in his or her attacks.

Apart from the two strategies mentioned above (category 1 and category 2), the next most-used strategies in Obama's blog were attacking the competence and leadership qualities of Romney (category 3) and attacking the strategy of campaigning (category 4). There were 59 instances criticizing Romney's competence and 58 instances attacking the campaign strategy. As with the comparison above between the use of strategy number 2 in Obama's and Romney's blogs, a similar finding concerns the use of strategy number 4. Here too, the numbers of instances of the strategy in use are 58 in Obama's blog while Romney's blog had 57 instances. Nevertheless, this strategy was used almost doubly as often in Obama's blog as in Romney's, as it was found in 44% of Obama's posts. Thus it seems that this has been seen as a more important strategy in Obama's camp than in Romney's. Perhaps this strategy was used quite a lot since it is one of the things that there is more material to attack on than for example in attacking the past record of Romney as he has not been in a similar office as Obama has.

Moreover, with regard to the frequency of using a strategy, Obama's blog had more often used the strategy of attacking the attacks that the opponent has made (category 7). In Obama's blog, 22% of the posts contained the use of this strategy whereas out of Romney's posts only 15% used it. This could suggest that as the incumbent candidate, Obama was more often required to defend himself against the attacks from the opponent than Romney as a challenger was, and as part of this, to criticize these attacks.

5   DISCUSSION

Campaigning in the United States during presidential elections often has a very negative atmosphere or tone between the candidates and the communication with each other. There can be very negative and even harsh attacks against the competing candidates. I find this to be an interesting feature of the campaigning process, and I wanted to find out how this negativity is present in the presidential election of 2012. As the Internet has become increasingly central in campaigning in the past few presidential elections, the assumption is that candidates' websites, for example, have also increased in importance. Thus it is relevant to analyze the websites, because they are ever more central in the campaigning process. These websites are

accessible to a large portion of the voting public and thus the possibilities for effective online campaigning have multiplied.

Blogs have also become more and more important as a phenomenon and this is something that the campaign strategists today have noticed and have thus included blogs on the candidates' web pages. The blog is an easy way to stay updated on the campaign and on the candidate's actions, and so it is also a popular feature on the website. Thus, it is relevant to analyze the blogs because they are a central part of campaigning and thus have a possible effect on voters.

Perhaps the increased use of blogs on candidate websites is just one part of a trend to make the candidates seem closer to the voters. Another example of this could be the many instances of for instance Obama appearing on talk shows or even humorous sketches. I have noticed that these kinds of appearances, for example, have multiplied in recent years and are part of the tendency to appear more like the relatable and having a fun personality.

In addition, I think that it is interesting and relevant to analyze how negative images of opposing candidates are created, as it seems that negativity is continually increasing in campaigning. Geer (2006: 39) maintains that it is agreed that over the last few decades, the frequency of attacking in campaign adverts has been rising. It appears that creating a negative image of the other candidate is a key part of the campaign strategy. Making the other candidate appear incompetent has perhaps become more important than, or at least equally as important as, making oneself look good and competent.

Deciding on the amount of negativity to employ in an election campaign is presumably not an easy task. There are benefits to being negative against the opponent, as has been discussed previously, but if a candidate is perceived to be too negative, the amounting backlash can be very harmful. Thus, it is a risky game. Another issue that campaign strategists need to consider when going negative is the incumbent-challenger configuration. As has been discussed, whether the candidate is an incumbent or challenger has been noted by several studies to influence the rate and style of going negative. Furthermore, the voters might judge the challenger and incumbent candidates slightly differently because one of them is already the president and thus expected to behave in a certain manner. The upcoming presidential election in 2016 in the United States presents another interesting arena for this kind of negativity research. This time, there will be no incumbent candidate in the race, and thus the starting point is at least on a superficial level equal between all of the candidates. Naturally, in reality there are vast differences in their initial position due to other factors, such

as their standing inside their respective parties, but none of them is the incumbent and thus in a stronger position resulting from that.

Through my analysis, I have discovered what the most typical strategies used in creating a negative image of the opponent are in this specific context of the presidential election of 2012 in the United States. Through a modified grounded theory approach and applying the constant comparative method as well as employing some of Trent and Friedenberg's strategies, I devised eight strategy categories of creating a negative image for the opponent. The result was that I was able to describe the different ways of attacking the opponent and creating an unfavorable image of him to voters, and thus gained an understanding of how the two candidates differed from each other in terms of strategy and learned what the most frequently used strategies were by each candidate. This in turn paints a picture of the overall campaign of each candidate and what strategies they have deemed important.

Overall, my analysis showed that Obama's blog included less negativity towards Romney than vice versa. As I have suggested previously, in my opinion, the underlying reason for this is the fact that Obama is the incumbent candidate and Romney the challenger candidate, which affects the overall structure of the two campaigns and the position of the candidates from the beginning. The main objective for a challenger candidate is to try and convince voters that the incumbent president has failed and therefore needs to be replaced. This leads to attacks against the incumbent's record as President and negativity in many of its forms. The incumbent on the other hand needs to show why the opponent does not have the competence and merit to be elected President and why the status quo ought to be maintained. Thus, the starting point and the underlying situation are different for the two candidates, which manifests in different types of campaign strategies and their use of negativity against their opponent. My findings concur with previous work on the tendency of incumbent and challenger candidates to go negative and add to that knowledge. It is widely agreed in the field that incumbents are more likely to be less negative and that defense is often a more likely strategy for them (see e.g. Trent and Friedenberg 2000).

Buell and Sigeleman (2008, cited in Sullivan and Sapir 2012: 293) point out that many studies have analyzed whether there is some consistency in how much Republican candidates versus Democratic candidates go negative. They state that it is actually quite random how candidates from each party use negativity in their campaigns (Buell and Sigeleman 2008, cited in Sullivan and Sapir 2012: 293). In addition, Geer (2006: 39) points out that there is no theory that would suggest that either Democrats or Republicans would be more inclined to

attack the opponent. Therefore, it cannot be said that a candidate from one party is always more negative than the other party's candidate. Thus, although my findings suggest that the Republican Party nominee Romney was more negative in his campaign blog, they cannot be used to further generalize that Republican candidates as a rule are more negative in their campaign communication. In a study that analyzes, for instance, the blogs of all candidates in a presidential race during the entire campaign period could draw wider-ranging conclusions about this kind of variation in terms of political party, even though, in that case the results would only apply to that specific election.

In the end, as we know, it was Barack Obama who succeeded in securing a second term in office on November 6th 2012. Naturally there were many reasons for his victory over the challenger Mitt Romney, but perhaps the overall positive style of his campaign was one reason for it. As I have stated above, Obama's blog was significantly more positive than that of Romney's. I do not think that the tone of a campaign is insignificant to the success of a candidate in an election. Trent and Friedenberg (2000: 102) also point out that Americans typically respond to optimism. Thus, a positive and optimistic campaign might often have more resonance among American voters than a more negative one, and the blog of a candidate does also add to the overall style of a campaign.

Compared with the findings of Momoc (2009), for instance, about the use of blogs by presidential candidates in the Romanian election in 2009, the amount of negativity was hugely more substantial towards the opponent in the 2012 presidential election in America. Momoc found that attacks against the opponent were made infrequently in the blogs. Obviously the context of these two elections is very different and perhaps cannot as such be compared to any great degree. However, one point to make about this comparison is that perhaps the style of negative campaigning against the opponent has not yet arrived to many countries, such as Romania, in the same magnitude as it is now in the U.S., which, as has been established, has been the pioneering country in this manner of campaigning. I would argue that this kind of negative campaigning is on the rise in other countries as well, and therefore it would be an interesting field to study in the future in regards to European countries, for instance.

Ideally, my research could be used as a basis for similar kind of research in the area of political communication, also outside the context of the United States. Perhaps the categories I have used for analyzing the different strategies of communication to develop a negative image of the opposing candidate can be used in other studies as well. However, it may be assumed that the categories that I have used may work best in an American political context

as negativity, in amount and content, can differ significantly from one context to the next. Nevertheless, I believe that the categories can be useful when studying negative political communication in other contexts as well, at least in a modified manner. For instance, this kind of negativity research could be applied to the context of Finnish elections. There is a tendency nowadays towards increased negativity in campaigning in Finland as well, and thus it would be interesting to study the strategies used in this context. In addition, Vesnic-Alujevic (2011: 414) states that there is a gap in the research on blogs of politicians in the European context. Thus, looking at blog use in campaigning on the national level in different European countries or in European Parliament elections, for instance, would definitely yield interesting results.

Moreover, it would be useful in the future to study the use of implicit negative instances employed in campaigning. In my data there was an abundance of implicit negativity towards the opponent, but as I have previously stated, I could not in this present study analyze those instances, as well. However, in my view, these implicit instances might be even more effective in influencing the voters' opinions than the very blunt, explicit negative references. Thus, I think that in future research this topic should be further explored. Moreover, my study does not reveal which side uses implicit negativity more than the other side. Perhaps the incumbent could employ implicatures more readily than explicit attacks. This is something that a more extensive study could discover.

In addition, in further research, analyzing a longer target period of blog posts would give more substantive information about the use of negativity in campaigning. For example analyzing the entire time period since the launch of the blog until the end of campaigning would produce more comprehensive and reliable results. Additionally, another significant area to study in the future would be the pictures and videos that are presented on the blogs. There were quite many videos posted on the blogs that I analyzed, for example Obama's blog included narrated videos that presented different graphs and data, which attacked Romney. In another study, it would be interesting to analyze this kind of data as well.

Moreover, an interesting topic to focus on in future research would be the effect that the negativity on the candidate websites and the blogs can have on the voters and especially those who are yet undecided and have not chosen their preferred candidate. As I have suggested previously, the undecideds might be those most likely to be influenced by the information and the negativity on the sites as they are the ones who are more likely to visit both candidates' websites, whereas voters with stronger party affiliation may only frequent their own candidate's site or blog.

Finally, as the use of new media technologies and social media applications in campaigning further increases, it will be important to study their implications for political communication and campaign activities. The trend seems to be that politicians are trying to get closer and closer to voters and this brings new dimensions into campaign work, as well. President Obama created his own personal twitter account on May 18th, 2015 so it seems that this kind of use of new media technologies and applications is already reaching the highest levels of politics and thus changing the tendencies of political communication and also widening the platform of political campaigning.

6   CONCLUSION

My research set out to discover how Barack Obama's and Mitt Romney's blogs created a negative image of the opponent in the 2012 presidential election. After familiarizing myself with relevant previous research and through my own initial analysis, I devised eight strategy categories of creating a negative image for the opponent. These categories comprehensively describe what kinds of attacks and criticism is launched against the other side. My focus was on the direct, explicit negative instances, of which there was plenty in my data spanning a one-month period right before Election Day.

As my first research question dealt with *how* the negative image was created, my devising of the strategy categories from previous literature and my own analysis was part of the answer. That was the basis for my subsequent analysis. Throughout the process of analysis, the content of each category became clearer and more nuanced through the use of sub-categories, and this way, the answer to the first research question also became crystallized.

My key findings are that the most often used strategies in Obama's blog were attacking the policies, plans and agenda of Romney (category 1) and attacking his integrity, values and views (category 2), whereas Romney's blog most often employed the strategy of attacking the policies, plans and agenda of Obama (category 1), but also attacking the competence and leadership qualities of Obama (category 3) and attacking his past record (category 5). Thus, the one clear similarity in the two blogs was the extensive use of attacks against the policies of the opponent. In a presidential election, I would argue, it is natural that policies and plans for future are at the center of attention, and this kind of criticism from both sides can add important insight into the public discussion about the things that United States and its citizens are dealing with. Therefore, and as Geer (2006) has also emphasized, these

attacks or criticisms can actually be a positive thing as they are able to bring different issues to the forefront and to the public's attention. It is important to remember that negativity in elections is not necessarily only a negative thing, but can also have benefits for politics and public discussion.

My second research question was about the *amount* of negativity between the candidates. As I have presented above, Romney's blog was clearly more negative towards Obama than the other way around. There may be many reasons for this, but one of them is very likely due to the fact that Romney was the challenger and Obama the incumbent candidate. It might be argued that the closeness of the race may have influenced the overall amount of negativity during the race, although, as I have mentioned earlier, it is not completely agreed upon that this election was as tight as some argue.

In this study, I attempted to discover how negative images are created of opponents in a presidential election through the use of campaign blogs. My findings follow previous research in pointing out that the amount of negativity found was quite enormous. Another similarity with previous work on the subject was that the challenger candidate, Romney, was more negative than the incumbent candidate Obama. What my study attempted to do was to bring new insight into the area of political communication research and specifically to research on campaigning online and negativity in campaigning, and perhaps produce new understanding of the phenomenon of negativity in campaign blogs. As blogs and other new media technologies become more and more important in election campaigns, more similar research needs to be done in the future to more clearly understand how campaigning online is influencing elections worldwide.

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