

## Who REALLY Owns the Web?

A closer look at the online battle for The White House

*updated 8/24/08*

# 1. Overview

The battle between John McCain and Barack Obama is a war of words. What makes this election different is how far and fast those words can go. The Internet accelerates the reach of the candidates' messages through online news media, and blogging amplifies the voices of both sides' supporters. Attributor is tracking how McCain and Obama's messages move across the Internet and, for the first time, has measured the size of the online audience reading these messages.

This is the second of a series of regular insights Attributor will be sharing between now and November 4<sup>th</sup>.

## What we did:

- Used the Attributor platform to capture each candidate's key issues and speeches as stated on their official web sites: [www.johnmccain.com](http://www.johnmccain.com) and [www.barackobama.com](http://www.barackobama.com).
- Tracked the distribution of each candidate's words across 25 Billion+ pages, including blogs and social networks, looking for unique web pages containing extensive matches of their speeches and official position statements.
- Analyzed and categorized the individual sites and pages containing the candidates' messages.
- Used Attributor's Audience Finder™ to estimate the reach of each candidate's messages across the Internet.

## Key Findings (8/24):

- Obama's messages continue to draw a larger online audience, but McCain closed the gap by almost 10% in the last two weeks. Obama's messages received an estimated 38 million page views, compared to 36 million for McCain. Two factors appear to be driving McCain's comeback.
  - McCain surged in the blogosphere which has been an area of Obama's strength. Almost 350 new bloggers picked up McCain's message, a 30% advantage over Obama. This translated into a 2:1 blog page view advantage across U.S. visitors over the last two weeks and ate into Obama's overall audience lead in blogs.
  - McCain's negative campaigning appears to be paying off. Obama attacks received an estimated 2.8 Million page views August-to-date – almost 3x as many as attacks on McCain over the same time period.
- Despite allegations of media favoritism, McCain's words are featured 80% more often on news sites than Obama's. McCain beats Obama by almost 3 to 1 on the major networks' websites (Fox, NBC, CBS, ABC, and CNN).
- McCain's messages continue to be picked up more from his position statements (55%) than his speeches (45%)  
Obama's messages are picked up more often through his speeches (67%) than his position statements (33%).
  - Each candidate's position on the economy is now the most widely read across the web with Obama's Economic position leap-frogging his Iraq policy for the first time.
  - In just 3 weeks, Obama's Berlin speech has gone viral and has been viewed an estimated 2 million times - off of Obama's official site.

## 2. Most Popular Issues and Speeches

*Figure 1.1: Obama’s Hottest Content*

Most Popular Issues as of 8/24/08	Most Popular Speeches as of 8/24/08
Economy	Berlin: A World that Stands as One
War in Iraq	A More Perfect Union
Family	Final Primary Night
Technology	The America We Love
Energy & Environment	AIPAC Policy Conference

1.1 There was a major shakeup in Obama’s Top 5 Issues as Economy overtook Iraq for the first time after weeks of Iraq atop the chart. The spread of Obama’s Economy issue more than doubled over the last two weeks and spread three times as much as the average issue. On the speech front, Obama’s speech in Berlin easily held its newfound ground at the top of the chart, beating out his A More Perfect Union Speech (the longtime number one) for the top spot.

*Figure 2.1: McCain’s Hottest Content*

Most Popular Issues 8/24/08	Most Popular Speeches 8/24/08
McCain Economic Plan	Energy Security
Lexington Project (Energy)	Energy Security & Our National Security
Human Dignity and Sanctity of Life	A Leader We Can Believe In
Protecting Second Amendment Rights	2008 National Council of La Raza Convention
Health Care System Reform	Comprehensive Plan for Energy Security

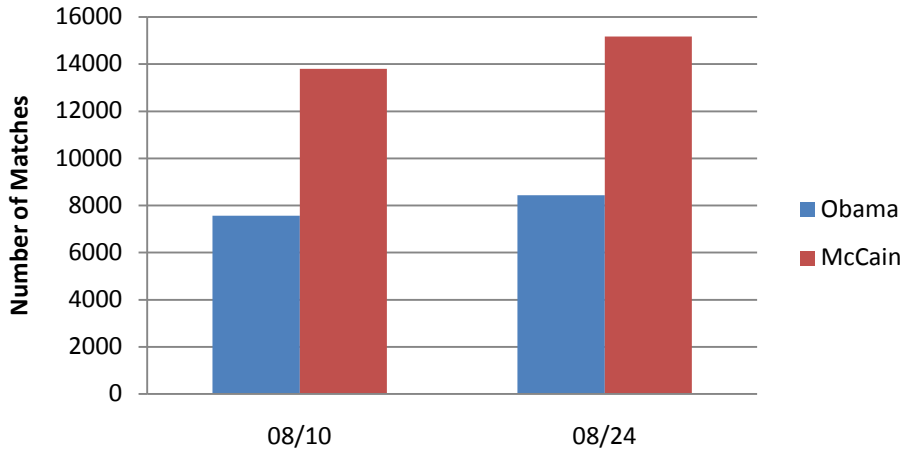
2.1 The order of McCain’s most popular was unchanged as the Economy and Energy trends continued. The presence of McCain’s speeches on Energy Security & National Security increased 25% over the last two weeks. Spread of the McCain Economic Plan increased 45% in this period. Those topics each spread across the web about five times more than McCain’s average issue and speech over the last two weeks.

### 3. True or False? Attributor Investigates Election 2008’s Conventional Wisdom

**Conventional Wisdom:** The news media is in love with Barack Obama and gives his messages a disproportionate amount of coverage.

**Attributor Says:** False

#### News Site Matches

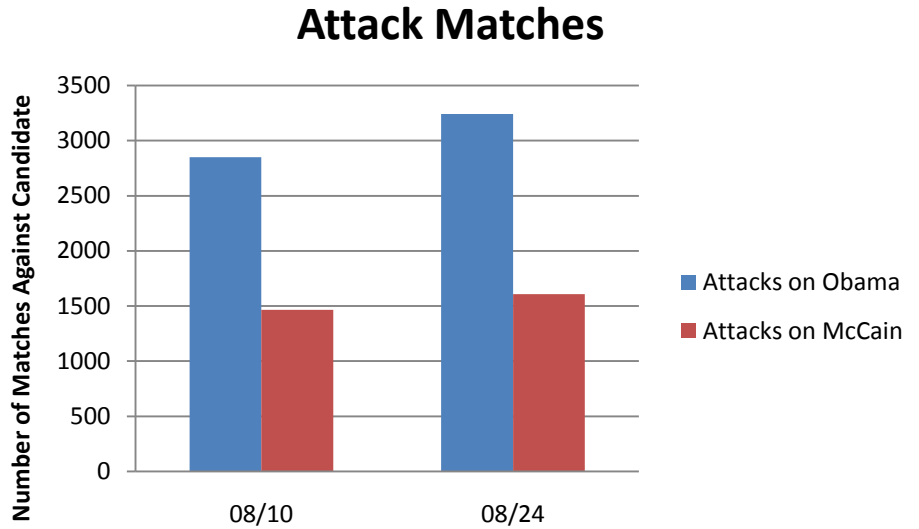


Perhaps this is true when it comes to television or print. But when it comes to coverage of each candidate’s position statements and speeches, McCain is trouncing Obama. He’s out-matching Obama almost 3 to 1 on the major networks’ websites (Fox, NBC, CBS, ABC, and CNN). When local and national newspaper and magazine websites are factored in, McCain still outdoes Obama almost 2 to 1.

**Conventional Wisdom:** Obama and McCain are attacking other with negative messages at roughly the same rate.

**Attributor Says: False**

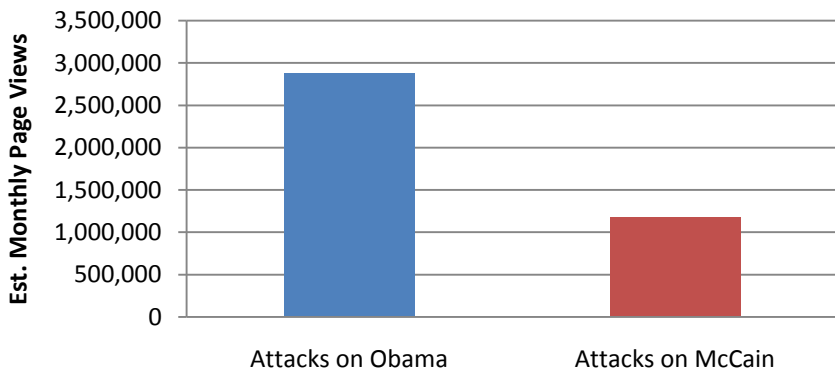
Within the last two weeks, criticism of Obama has surged and his words have been attacked\* more than twice as much as McCain. Since our study began over a month ago, McCain’s slim lead in attacks has more than doubled. Interestingly, the increase in “attack matches” on Obama coincides with McCain release of the Paris Hilton advertisement and John Corsi’s new book, which is highly critical of Obama.



**Conventional Wisdom:** Americans discount negative campaigning as “politics”.

**Attributor Says: False**

**How many are viewing the online attacks?**



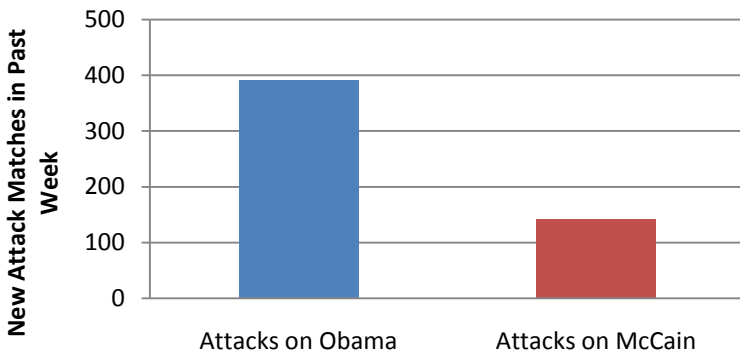
The increased negative campaigning on McCain’s behalf is paying off. Americans are reading the attacks- and in significant numbers. In August, there were an estimated 2,800,000 views of attacks on Obama, compared to 1,100,000 views of attacks on McCain- almost a 3:1 ratio!

\*An “attack match” represents an issue or speech match on a site known to be “unfriendly” to the candidate. We matched against the 50 most trafficked liberal sites, the 50 most trafficked conservative sites, and many other sites known to be political based on our domain keyword search. McCain’s issues and speeches were matched on 160 unique liberal sites, versus 281 conservative sites for Obama. Each candidate matched on approximately 320 “friendly” sites. “Site” refers to a unique domain.

**Conventional Wisdom: Negative campaigning has been steady throughout the campaign.**

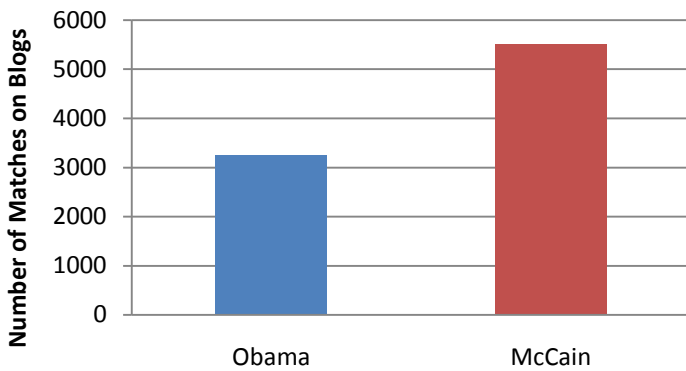
**Attributor Says: False**

**This Week: Increase in Attacks**

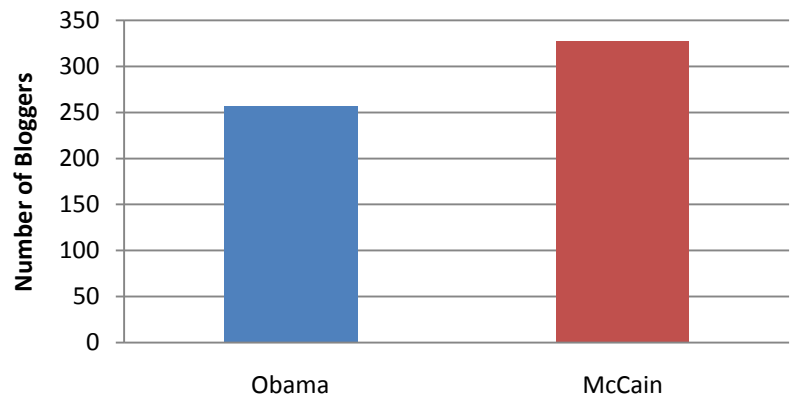


The past two weeks represented the biggest gap in attack matches yet, with Obama’s issues and speeches being criticized almost three times as much as McCain’s. These online attacks seem to mirror a recent strategy by McCain and his supporters to “go negative.” It has been paying off in the polls, but how much of this was driven by the web? See below for numbers on how these messages were picked up across blogs.

**This Week: Blog Matches**

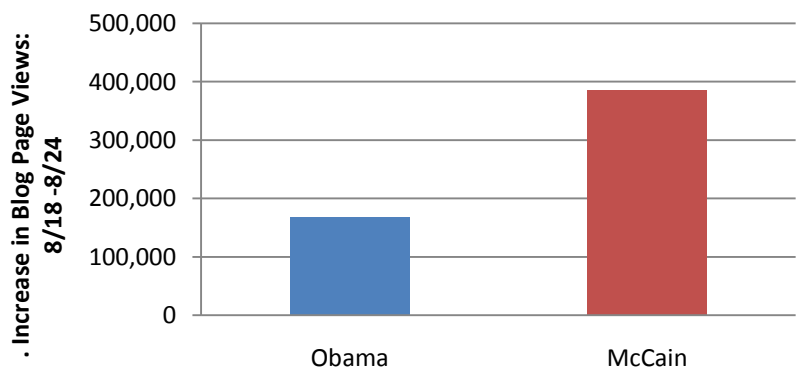


**This Week: New Bloggers**



The Blogosphere has always been Obama’s strong suit—until the last two weeks where McCain has 70 more new bloggers than Obama writing about his issues and speeches. McCain’s issues and speeches appeared on blogs at a nearly two to one rate over the last two weeks. This translated into a break-through blog audience week for McCain; for the first time, his estimated monthly blog traffic increased more than Obama’s – by more than 200,000 page views. Obama’s audience lead in the Blogosphere has shrunk nearly 10%.

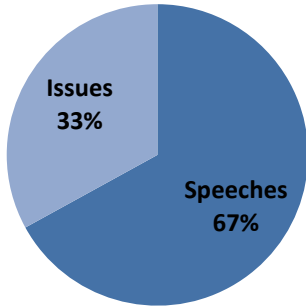
**This Week: Increase in Blog Audience**



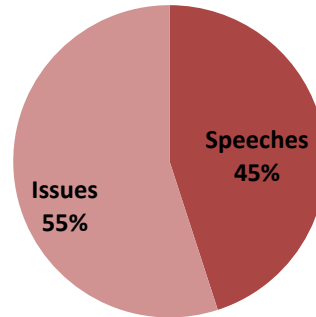
**Conventional Wisdom:** Obama’s message is best delivered through speeches, while McCain’s strength is with his position on issues.

**Attributor Says:** True

### Obama's Message Makeup



### McCain's Message Makeup



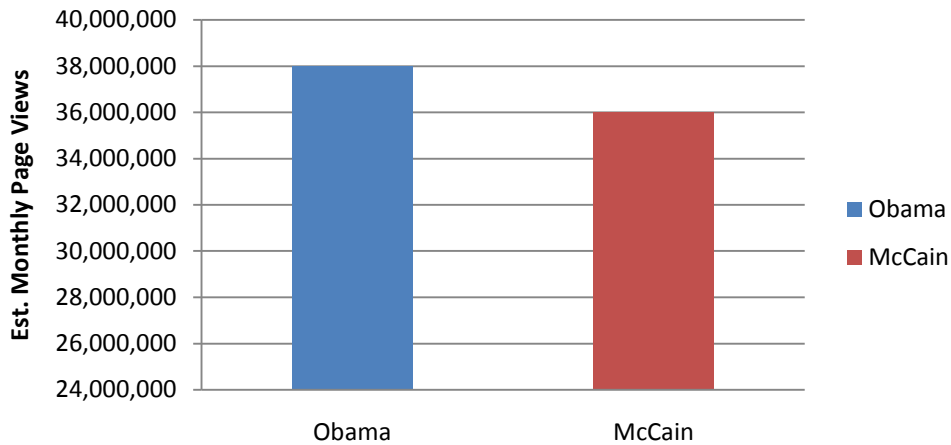
Obama’s speeches are being picked up on the Web much more than his position statements. The opposite is true for McCain.

**Conventional Wisdom:** By virtue of his appeal to a younger demographic, Obama is reaching a larger audience online.

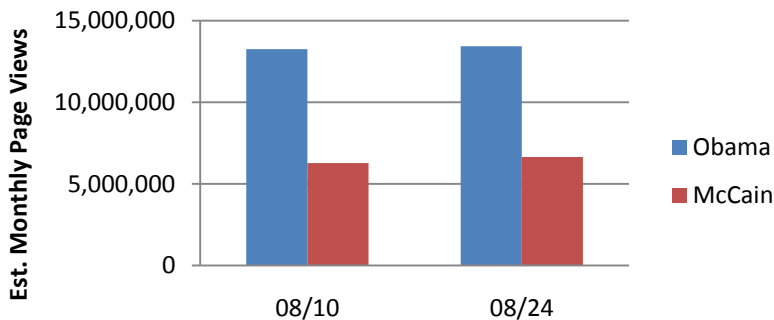
**Attributor Says:** True – but it’s getting much closer

Obama’s audience advantage across the blogosphere gives him a slight advantage over McCain overall.

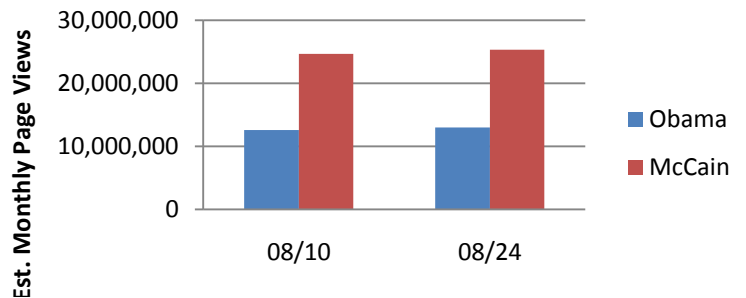
### Whose Messages Are Viewed Most Across the Web?



### Whose Messages Are Viewed Most Across Blogs?



### Whose Messages Are Viewed Most Across News Sites?



### **About Attributor**

Attributor is a privately held technology company headquartered in Redwood City, California. Its content tracking and programming platform enables publishers to build value with their content wherever it appears on the Internet. With Attributor, publishers can now program when, how and where their content is presented across the Web and social networks. Advanced fingerprinting algorithms, a large-scale crawling infrastructure and detailed contextual analysis provide publishers with Web-wide visibility of their articles, images or videos. Customers like the Associated Press, Reuters and CondéNet, can identify new sales leads and revenue-sharing opportunities, monitor licensed uses and derive more links and better search engine placement. More information can be found online at <http://www.attributor.com>.

### **About Audience Finder™**

Audience Finder is a proprietary tool that enables publishers of all types to quantify the reach of their content across the Web and social networks. Audience Finder leverages the Attributor platform which tracks text, images and video content across billions of web pages and hundreds of advertising networks to estimate and capture publishers' web-wide advertising revenue opportunities.