

Running head: BLOGGING: JOURNALISM AS USUAL?

Blogging: Journalism As Usual? A Systematic Review of the Theory and the Practices of
Public Affairs Blogging

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Tom Bakker, MA

Prof. Dr. Klaus Schönbach

Prof. Dr. Claes H. de Vreese

The Amsterdam School of Communications Research

University of Amsterdam

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Abstract

In this paper we take a closer look at the nature and characteristics of a popular form of non-traditional journalism, *public affairs blogging*. In this paper we systematically review research about public affairs blogging, summarizing what is known about blogs' producers, content, audience and their effects on different levels. Our results indicate that public affairs blogs are generally produced and consumed by the same people that use traditional journalism, although blog visitors are usually a bit younger. However, blogs are narrow in focus, have a personal character, contain little original content, and are more opinionated. Blogs are complementary to traditional media, mainly providing opinion and interpretation of facts presented by the latter, while doing little original reporting. Overall, research on the use of public affairs blogs and its effects on traditional media and politics is still in its infancy.

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The pervasiveness of the Internet in society has led to many speculations about its consequences for journalism. Apart from technological changes for the working practices of traditional journalists and mainstream news organizations, the discussion around the participation of citizens in the journalistic process has become front and center. In this light Deuze, Bruns and Neuberger (2007) contend that “digital and networked journalism in whatever shape or form must be seen as a praxis that is not exclusively tied to salaried work or professional institutions anymore” (p. 323). As free and easy-to-use publishing means have significantly lowered the threshold for participation in the news process, people without access to expensive printing presses or cable networks have started to engage in distributing news in all possible flavors over the Web.

Taking stock of the vast amount of recent research on the Internet as an information outlet, it becomes apparent that weblogs have become one of the most prominent and popular online information channels. While there were only a handful of blogs since the term was first coined in 1997 (Blood, 2002), in 2006 the estimated amount of blogs worldwide surpassed 200 million and between one and two new blogs were created every second (Sifry, 2006). An increasing number of blogs engage in the publication and discussion of issues of public interest and politics, which we in this paper refer to as *public affairs*. While studies have dug deeper into specific aspects of public affairs blogging and its relation vis-à-vis traditional journalism, an overview of research on public affairs blogging is missing. This study consists of a systematic categorization and discussion of extant studies in the realm of public affairs blogging. A better

understanding of what we know about public affairs blogging helps to identify research areas that hitherto have received little or no attention.

A brief history of citizen participation in journalism

Already before the Internet there was a trend towards more engagement of citizens in the news process. This process started in the early nineties with the emergence of *civic* or *public journalism*, a movement that aimed at closing an alleged gap that had emerged between citizens and journalists. Proponents of this movement appealed to journalists and news organizations to actively engage citizens in the news production process in order to restore the role of journalists as a mouth piece of the public, and hence to establish a more balanced and democratic process of news production (Black, 1997; Charity, 1995; Glasser, 1999; Merrill, Gade, & Blevens, 2001; Rosen & Merritt, 1994). Although a great breakthrough of civic journalism held off, it is argued that its goal to decrease the gap between public and journalists to a large extent has been integrated in the routines of many of today's newsrooms, with the Internet as the most important driver and facilitator (Nip, 2006, 2008; St. John III, 2007; Witt, 2004).

Although there have always been forms of audience participation in the news process in the form of letters-to-the-editors and calls to the newsroom, the Internet has lowered the entry barriers for participation substantially. Most of today's news organizations call upon their audience to assist them in their news gathering process by sending in digital photos, video footage or other newsworthy information. Particularly during events like natural disasters (e.g., the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, 2005 Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans) and crisis situations (9/11 attacks, 2004 Madrid train bombings) *user-generated content* (UGC) has resulted in an enormous amount of audiovisual

material that has reached the front pages and broadcasts of mainstream media. Despite extensive start-up costs and many failed initiatives, most news organizations have embraced and integrated the use of UGC one way or another (e.g., Domingo, Quandt, Heinonen, Paulussen, Singer & Vujnovic, 2008; Deuze et al., 2007; Thurman, 2008).

Online audience participation of course reaches further than traditional news organizations. Weblogs and media platforms like MySpace and YouTube have allowed citizens to create their own information outlet, circumventing the editorial processes of traditional news media. The most common term to describe the act of citizens publishing news with no or little editorial control by traditional journalists is usually referred to as *participatory journalism* (Bowman & Willis, 2003) and *citizen journalism* (for a discussion about the origins of the notion of citizen journalism, see Gillmor, 2008; Rosen, 2008). However, amateur journalism without intervention by media professionals has been criticized (e.g., Jarvis, 2006), which has led to a call for a more collaborative practice of alternative journalism, meaning that citizens (as active sources or information suppliers) should work together with traditional journalists (as interpreters and skilled writers) to create news. Such hybrid forms of journalism have been referred to as *pro-am journalism* (Rosen, 2006), *grassroots journalism*, *networked journalism* (Jarvis, 2006), *open-source journalism* (Leonard, 1999), *crowdsourced journalism* or *distributed journalism*.

Hopes and Fears for New Forms of Journalism

The role of news media and journalists in the political process has become more central as most democracies have entered a stage in which politics is increasingly being driven and influenced by the media, generally referred to as *mediatization* (see Blumler &

Gurevitch, 1995; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Schulz, 2004). Although traditional news media still hold a dominant position in the world of public affairs news, weblogs and media platforms like YouTube have greatly expanded the journalistic domain. In this light, *citizen journalism*, *blogging* and *user-generated-content* have been among the most popular buzzwords in the last few years.

Mainly as a result of different understandings and ideological starting points, the debate has been characterized by a high degree of discordant opinions and expectations. Many have hailed citizen journalism and blogging because of their open, egalitarian and autonomous nature, which would result in positive developments for the quality and diversity of news (e.g., Bowman & Willis, 2003; Gilmor, 2004). Proponents argue that people outside traditional media can serve a watchdog function by bringing to light public political bias or incorrect news coverage in mainstream media as well as providing a platform for ‘unheard voices’ in mass media. In this respect, traditional media are often criticized because of an alleged elitist top-down approach, ignoring the interest of their audience. The (near) absence of editorial control in most alternative outlets is hailed in such accounts as a positive development for the diversity of public affairs information across the board. Bruns (2005) holds that the Internet has eroded traditional gatekeeping and has transformed reporting to a more open process that he labels *gatewatching*: online content producers (which he calls *producers*) providing their audience with hyperlinks and information that might be relevant to them, shifting the final evaluation of the content from the traditional journalist to the audience.

However, at the same time there have been many who expressed fears about the negative ramifications of the Internet on the quality of public debate and professional

journalism (e.g., Keen, 2007; Knapen, 2008; Lemann, 2006; Sunstein, 2007). According to such critics, the ‘imprudent’ participation of people outside traditional journalism poses severe challenges for the roles of traditional journalists as interpreters of public affairs and agenda-setters of the public debate. They cast doubts on the alleged capacity of non-traditional journalists to perform ‘true’ journalism by pointing at the lack of solid editorial processes and journalistic practices that should ensure acceptable levels of objectivity and factual correctness. Boriss (2007) concludes that it has become clear that participation of amateurs in the news process does not work because of a lack of experts: “The model that will work (...) is one that combines the talents of topic experts throughout the web with those who have a knack for aggregating and editing their material to satisfy an audience” (n.p.). Although there are no consensus or definitive answers, the wide range of opinions and discussions about the potential impact of public affairs blog shows that traditional notions of what constitutes journalism are incontestably being challenged in the age of the Internet.

Already since the rise of the Web there have been attempts to create order out of chaos and to categorize online forms of journalism (including blogs). Apart from technological advancements, key elements in such endeavors have been the increased presence and participation of the audience in the news process and the loosening or abolishment of editorial processes, leading to different categories of online journalism (e.g., Bruns, 2008; Deuze, 2003; Nip, 2006). The unprecedented popularity of weblogs as journalistic outlets has contributed to the need for such classifications. While there were only a handful of active blogs during the late nineties, in 2008 the total estimated amount of weblogs worldwide is exceeding 100 million (Technorati, 2008). In the early days

weblogs were primarily seen as the domain of citizens and as a technological upgrade of the more traditional and more static *personal homepage*. Sharing private affairs on individual weblogs is blossoming according to many (Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus, 2005; Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Schwartz, 2004). It has been noted that the prominence of blogs for coverage of news and public affairs has boosted since the 2004 elections in the U.S. (Rainie, Cornfield & Corrigan, 2005). Now that weblogs increasingly engage in covering and discussing public affairs, most studies on this alternative form of public affairs journalism focus on disentangling the *blogosphere* (the universe of available blogs), as general claims about this wide and diverse network as a whole are problematic given its size and heterogeneity of content and format (Tremayne, 2007, p. vii).

Method

This literature review focuses on studies on blogging, as a form of citizen journalism, about public affairs. Public affairs journalism in this paper encompasses political issues, public policy or information otherwise of public interest. Our focus is on blogging performed by non-traditional journalists, so blogs maintained by traditional journalists within institutional news organizations (the *j-blog*, see Robinson, 2006; Singer, 2005) were not considered. Studies on blogs as personal diaries and blogs with content not related to public affairs (e.g., entertainment, technology, education) were also excluded, as were studies about weblogs by politicians or political organizations, which are generally used as a campaign instrument instead of as a journalistic outlet.

The research database of ISI Web of Knowledge was used to search for peer reviewed scientific articles about blogging. We required the presence of the term *blog*

(including words that contained the segment *blog*, like *weblog(s)*, *blogging* and *blogosphere*) in the title, abstract or list of keywords. Although this initially produced a large amount of articles ($N = 440$), only 29 articles addressed blogs in the context of politics, public affairs or traditional journalism. We conducted a similar search with EBSCOhost's *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, which produced 23 relevant articles. Using a snowballing method, the reference lists of the articles were examined for additional relevant studies. Additionally, PiCarta and Google Scholar were used to look for relevant material. Because this review tried to shed light on what is *really* known about public affairs blogging, we only described studies with a (systematic) analyses of empirical data (not more than 30), and excluded descriptions of the myriad normative and theoretical articles that have been published in recent years.

Additionally, we used survey data from the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press (Rainie, 2005; Lenhart & Fox, 2006) and data from Dautrich and Barnes (2005a; 2005b), because these large-scale surveys are amongst the few that contain data from representative samples of the (U.S.) population. This independent research organization PEW in 2004 and 2006 conducted two nationwide random-digit dial telephone surveys specifically focused on the users and producers of blogs. Dautrich and Barnes in 2005 conducted telephone surveys amongst 1,000 American adults and 300 newspaper and television journalists. To ensure the quality of the studies we discussed, we did not include conference papers or other unpublished works.

Results

We have categorized our review into four sections, consequently discussing what is known about the production of blogs, the content, its audience and its effects.

The production of public affairs blogs

Characteristics. Who actually engages in public affairs blogging? A consistent pattern emerges of educated, male adults that maintain public affairs blogs (often referred to as political blogs). Herring et al. (2005) in a content analysis of more than 200 blogs from a diverse universe of weblogs concluded that the majority of filterbloggers (blogs discussing and linking to news and public events) were men in their early twenties. More than ninety percent of the blogs were single-authored and most bloggers revealed personal information on their site, like their full name and educational background (see also Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). Similar patterns were found in studies that surveyed bloggers (see Kaye, 2005; Lenhart & Fox, 2006; McKenna & Pole, 2008; Pedersen & Macafee, 2007; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). Harp and Tremayne (2006) analyzed the thirty highest-ranked political blogs and found that 90% were written by men, Tremayne, Zheng, Lee and Jeong (2006) found that 99% of the bloggers on 79 blogs that addressed the Iraq war were male, and Lenhart and Fox (2006) found that political bloggers are likely to have some college degree.

Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun and Jeong (2007) described the characteristics of five political 'elite' bloggers (A-list bloggers) that have been very prominent in the public debate in the U.S. and are also cited as evidence for the success of political blogging. All five bloggers were male, educated professionals: Joshua Micah Marshall (Talking Points Memo) is an ex-editor and freelance correspondent, Duncan Black (Atrios) is employed as a lawyer, Markos Moulitsas Zuniga (Daily Kos) earns his living as a political consultant, Glenn Reynolds (Instapundit) works a law professor, and Andrew Sullivan (The Daily Dish) is a successful conservative freelancer.

Where does blogging take place? Almost without exception empirical studies focused on the American ‘political blogosphere’ and English-language content. The United States is one of the countries where an active network of influential blogs has already come of age, with boosts after the attacks of 9/11 and the 2004 election. Technorati – the Web’s largest worldwide blogtracking engine – showed that almost 40% of all tracked blogs were English, followed by 33% Japanese blogs and 10% Chinese (Sifry, 2006). Although there are signs of uprising political blogospheres in other countries or regions, like Iran’s Weblogistan, no study with systematic empirical data was found that explored these networks.

The content of public affairs blogs

Blog functions. Two types of public affairs blogs have really come of age in the U.S.: *media watchblogs* and *political watchblogs*. These blogs critically observe and discuss the functioning and performance of politicians or traditional news journalism (McIntosh, 2005; Smolkin, 2004). American media watchblogs for example have been credited with the resignation of long-time CBS news anchor Dan Rather who was held responsible for presenting manipulated documents about George W. Bush’ draft for military service. Scott (2007) examined more than 5000 posts from four top political blogs and found that even these popular outlets mainly served as watchdogs for media and politics. Political and media watchblogs are also referred to as *filterblogs*: blogs containing lists of hyperlinks to online news elsewhere, larded with commentary and interpretation (Blood, 2002; Herring et al., 2005). The reported events are usually ‘external’ to the blogger (in contrast to the more diary-like or personal journal blogs) and often deal with ‘news’ of public or political interest (Herring et al., 2005). McKenna and

Pole (2008) found that around 90% of all 141 political bloggers they surveyed mainly engaged in informed their readers about articles in newspapers or posts on political blogs.

Many U.S. based weblogs have a specific focus on the war in Iraq and its (inter)national political implications. These war-specific blogs are referred to as *warblogs* and often function watchblogs function (Wall, 2005). *Milblogs* or *military blogs* are blogs that are maintained by soldiers on duty or veterans and publish unmediated eyewitness accounts (Schulman, 2005). Although currently there are more than 2000 active blogs in 39 countries according to the website milblogging.com, this particular genre has not yet been studied in scholarly articles. *Policy blogs* are brought into action mainly for informational purposes and in order to earn support for particular policies (McKenna, 2007; Pirch, 2008). Kahn and Kellner (2005) described how activists increasingly use blogs to organize and mobilize themselves. Blogs are also used as an outlet for specific geographic communities. These local blogs have been referred to as *community blogs*, *hyperlocal blogs* (Jarvis, 2004) and *placeblogs* (Kennedy, 2008). Although Lowrey and Mackay (2008) found that traditional journalists are increasingly aware of local blogs and their utility as early warning systems, we found no studies that systematically addressed the function of local blogs.

Hyperlinking. The extent to which blogs contain hyperlinks to traditional media, has been the key focus of five studies we found. Messner and Distaso (2008) found that weblogs heavily rely on newspapers sources and traditional media agenda when covering political issues (similar findings were reported by Lee, 2007; Reese et al., 2007; Thelwall, Byrne & Goody, 2007; Wallsten, 2007). Wallsten (2007), in a content analysis of both A-list blogs and less popular politics blogs, found that media coverage (non-

blogs) was in most cases preceding blog coverage and discussion, supporting the notion that political blogs' main goal is to function as watchdogs, not as news reporters.

Three studies looked at how much political polarization is taking place regarding linking practices (i.e., only linking to sources with similar political ideologies). Tremayne et al. (2006) and Xenos (2008) found that liberal and conservative blogs were indeed reluctant in linking to each other and operated in two rather isolated spheres. Reese et al. (2007) in a content analysis of a selection of six political commentary blogs and traditional news media found inconclusive evidence: About 60% of the outbound links were directing to outlets that did not have the same political ideology.

Style and Standards. The content of blogs has often been discussed in terms of its defining style. While neutrality and objectivity are important norms in traditional journalism (see Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001), it is generally assumed that blogs do not live up to this standard and that personal style and use of opinion are par for the course in the blogosphere. However, we only found five studies that substantiated claims about personal style and use of opinion in public affairs blogs with systematic empirical data. Wall (2005) looked at the narrative styles in warblogs and found that these outlets are personal in style and contain much opinion, while “the traditional voice for a professional journalist is detached, neutral, and tells ‘both’ sides of the story” (p. 161). Perlmutter and Schoen (2007), in an examination of thirty independent political top blogs, found that 23 of them had an outspoken (liberal or conservative) character. Tremayne et al. (2006) coded 97% of more than 4200 political blog postings as ‘opinion’ or ‘surveillance’, only 2% was considered ‘reporting’ (similar trends were found by Reese et al., 2007). Sweetser (2007) used an established measure to determine bias in coverage of

presidential nominations conventions in 2004, but the results were mixed and inconclusive. Although it is generally believed that blogs are less neutral and contain more opinion than traditional media, we found no studies that systematically examined how elements of partisanship and opinion manifested themselves in blogs.

Blogs are also expected to be more interactive and ‘conversational’ (Deuze, 2003), directly addressing their audience in their blog postings and providing a platform for discussion. However, to what extent elements of interactivity (comment feature, e-mail, social bookmarking, discussion forum, stylistic elements) were present *specifically* on public affairs blogs has not been studied to our knowledge.

The audience of blogs

Males, news consumers, and higher educated people are overrepresented in the group of political blog consumers (e.g., Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Dautrich & Barnes, 2005a). Eveland and Dylko (2007) found that political blog readers are more likely than non-readers to watch cable TV news, engage in online political discussions and to visit news sites. However, two representative surveys among the American public, showed that blogs are still not widely used. In a survey among 1000 Americans, Dautrich and Barnes (2005a) revealed that 92% never used blogs. From a representative PEW survey (Rainie, 2005) it became clear that 62% did not know what a blog was at all, while only 9% said they regularly or sometimes read political blogs.

A survey among 300 American traditional journalists showed that blog use among journalists is high: only 16% said they never visited blogs (Dautrich & Barnes, 2005b). Lowrey and Mackay (2008) explain traditional journalists’ high interest in blogs partly because news organizations are often targets of critical bloggers (watchbloggers).

Journalists' high use can also be explained by their use of (links to) blogs as news sources (Messner & Distaso, 2008). However, apart from the survey of Dautrich and Barnes (2005b), no data was found about the use of public affairs blogs of professionals in traditional media.

Motivations and credibility. Research about people's motivations for the use of public affairs blog is scant (Kaye, 2007). An explorative survey with open-ended questions revealed that for blogs – apart from their entertaining character – the most important motivations to visit blogs were that blogs provided respondents with links to other information sources, a wide variety of opinions and specific information of interest or information not available from traditional media (Kaye, 2007). Surveys have found that politically interested people judged blogs as more credible than less interested people (Johnson, Kaye, Bichard & Wong, 2007; Kaye & Johnson, 2004b). Motivations for blog use and reliance on blogs were found to predict users' perceived credibility of blogs (Kaye & Johnson, 2004b; Johnson et al., 2007). Although across all media levels of credibility were moderate, Internet users judged blogs as more credible than other offline and online news media (Johnson et al., 2007).

Effects of public affairs blogs

Studies that delved into the effects of public affairs blogging are sparse, despite the wide scope of research that has speculated and dwelled upon the potential of blogs

The audience. Although there have been high hopes for blogs' potential to politically engage people (e.g., Coleman, 2005), studies that systematically explored this area to our knowledge hardly exist. We found one study (Kaid and Postelnicu, 2007) that in an experimental setting tested how young people responded to political blog posts,

written by different sources: a political expert, an independent political interest, and a Hollywood celebrity. Respondents reported that similar levels of credibility, political support and cynicism, regardless of the source.

Media. Although studies have looked at public affairs blogs' use of (links to) traditional media sources, how blog coverage may affect the agenda of traditional media has hardly been investigated in a systematic way. An exception is Messner and Distaso (2008) note that newspaper journalists are increasingly using weblogs as (legitimate) sources. They analyzed news articles that used blogs as a source between 2000 and 2005 of the New York Times and the Washington Post. While in 2002 weblogs were only used 15 times as a source, in 2005 the number climbed to 436. Weblogs used as a 'secondary mention' climbed from 19 times in 2002, to 669 in 2005.

Politics. Although researchers expected that blogs in the realm of politics could affect politicians or policies, we found no studies that presented evidence for such claims. Articles have described how *political watchblogs* have stirred political discussion that led to real political consequences are often anecdotal in nature. One of the most recurring stories for example is how bloggers were a driving force in the resignation of Senate Republican leader Trent Lott after allegedly making racist remarks during a public appearance (Regan, 2003). Although studies about the effects of public affairs blogs are absent, a more general effect of the popularity of blogs with regard to politics is that politicians and political parties increasingly maintain blogs, seeking a more direct and unmediated form of communication with their voters (e.g., Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005; Williams, Trammell, Postelnicu, Landreville, & Martin, 2005).

Conclusion

Drezner and Farrell (2008) seemed to be in the right when they summarized the current state of research about blogs and politics as follows: “At present, scholarly research has little to add—not because this research is too theoretical, but because it is very nearly non-existent. What little academic work there is on blogs is highly variable in quality, and says little about their political role.” From the examination of the literature it has become clear that although public affairs blogging has become popular in a relatively short time, scientific attention is scattered, for some areas hardly existent and only few studies used empirical quantitative approaches to explore the uses and effects of public affairs blogs. However, some general conclusions can be drawn.

Our review of extant research shows that public affairs bloggers are male adults, have a high degree of education, and are politically interested. Popular public affairs blogs are often maintained by educated and politically interested people, like journalists, academics or people that otherwise engage in publishing information and opinion. Although blog advocates hoped that public affairs bloggers would develop into equal competitors to traditional journalists, this could not be supported by extant studies. Public affairs bloggers generally bite the hand that feeds them: They hardly produce any original content, but instead rely on the information and the agenda that has been set by traditional media. Public affairs blogs do not seem to replace traditional outlets, but rather have a complementary function, larding original media content with their own comments and opinion. Although blogs often contain specialized content (e.g., warblogs, policy blogs), they are still often critical observers instead of news reporters. The socio-demographics of the audiences of public affairs blogs do not seem to differ significantly from news consumers in general.

Research gaps and recommendations

Previous research has linked newspaper use with forms of civic and political participation (e.g., McLeod & Sotirovic, 2001; Scheufele, 2002). Similar positive relationships with political participation and discussion were found for consumption of (hard) news through television and the Internet (e.g., Norris, 1996; Shah, Cho, Eveland & Kwak, 2005; Tolbert & McNeal, 2003; Nah, Shah & Veenstra, 2006). However, as of yet such relationships have hardly been studied regarding the use of public affairs weblogs. Given the personal and opinionated nature of blogs (vis-à-vis the more neutral and detached style of coverage of traditional media), the influence on different levels of political behavior is an important area for future research.

Given the disproportional attention for the role of blogs in the American context, it would be relevant to tap the development and roles of public affairs blogs in countries with different media systems and journalistic cultures. Many European countries have press systems that were traditionally (or still are) organized along party lines and have dominant public broadcast systems, which contrasts with the situation in the U.S. (see Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Bucas and Fazaeli (2008) demonstrated that bloggers in (semi-)authoritarian regimes are often faced with political pressure and online censorship, and thus public affairs blogging can be expected to serve particular political functions not found in extant studies.

It was found that public affairs bloggers do little original reporting, are opinionated, and heavily link to and comment on news from traditional media. As it is very likely that blog use will continue to increase the coming years, it is relevant to investigate how opinion manifests itself on blogs and if opinions are substantiated with

evidence (e.g., by hyperlinking). It is also important to assess if high(er) levels of exposure to opinion on blogs affects political opinion, trust or engagement. Such issues have not been addressed in extant studies.

Although the growth of the political blogosphere and the high readership of public affairs blogs clearly indicate that blogs are popular, relatively little is known about the *motivations* for people to visit these blogs. As it is generally assumed that blogs hardly contain original content, it is likely that motivations other than information-seeking can help to explain the popularity of particular popular blogs.

Related to motivation for blog use is the credibility of blogs. Although it has been found under certain circumstances blogs were found more credible than other media, studies have not differentiated between the credibility of the blog posts (message credibility), blogs (medium credibility) and the blogger (source credibility) (see Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Sundar, 1999).

Li and Walejko (2008) showed there are various limitations in doing research on blogs and bloggers, as drawing representative samples from the Web is virtually impossible. This holds for all commonly used ways of sampling blogs and blog users: self-selected and convenience samples, sampling through blog hosts, sampling with the assistance of blog aggregators or indexing websites, and sampling from ready-published lists of blogs (2008). Almost without exception the studies in this article indicated that their conclusions could not be generalized to the whole population. To improve the quality of samples, Li and Walejko (2008) recommend using a combination of offline and online sampling methods.

To assess (1) how blog use changes over time, (2) if usage differs between age-cohorts and Internet experience levels, and (3) whether blog use and other media use inversely related or reinforcing each other, the use of longitudinal and panel data combined with cross-section designs is advisable (Slater, 2007).

The title of this article asked whether blogging is journalism as usual. On the one hand the answer could be answered 'yes', given the fact that popular public affairs blogs are produced by educated, politically interested male adults (echoing the general characteristics of traditional journalists) and are also consumed by audience that is also likely to read other forms of news. On the other hand, however, blogs clearly differ from traditional journalistic outlets given their individual character, opinionated and personal style, and little original news. While research about blogging is abundant, studies that specifically looked at the uses and effects of public affairs blogs is largely absent. To draw solid conclusions about the effects of blogs, much future research is needed.

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