

**BLOGGERS STRIKE A NERVE:
Examining the intersection of blogging and journalism**

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Paper submitted to the Media Ethics Division

AEJMC
2005 Covention
San Antonio, Texas
August 10-13

Abstract

Pamphleteers of the 18th century helped turn the tide against the King of England in the 13 original colonies. Now a new form of pamphleteer has arrived: bloggers. Thousands helped topple reporters Dan Rather and Jayson Blair, and politicians they felt disseminated inaccurate or inflammatory statements. As citizen journalists, they used camera phones, digital cameras and their blogs to keep the world informed about the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

After the 2004 presidential election and the bloggers' verbal assault on Rather, researchers sought out the authors of the 100 current events blogs with the highest Internet traffic in order to discover what they thought about politics, their role as bloggers in society, and their role as citizen journalists.

Of the 59 who responded to an online questionnaire, 43 percent were split evenly politically as Democrats or Republicans. More than 90 percent, however, considered blogs an important contributor to democracy, especially in an election year. Ninety-three-percent said fact-checking the traditional news media was an important role for bloggers.

Other views went to the core of the debate among traditional journalists, bloggers and blogger advocates over whether "citizen journalists" are actually journalists or nothing more than commentators or gossipers. More than 95 % of the authors said they relied heavily on other blogs, newspapers or Internet sources for information for their blogs. While the majority agreed that posting factual information was important, nearly 90 % opposed the journalism tradition of using an editor to check postings for accuracy.

BLOGGERS STRIKE A NERVE:

Examining their impact on the traditional news media and politics

Introduction

Nearly 7 out of 10 people in the United States use the Internet. The usage grew 112 percent between 2000 and 2004. In fact, 91 percent of the users in North America came from the United States. E-mail and instant messaging are the main reasons why so many people flock to the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2004).

Now there is a third reason for the growing interest in cyberspace. A 2004 Pew Internet Survey reports 44 percent of adult American Internet users, 53-million people, post information on their own blogs, their Web sites, or someone else's (Lenhart, Horrigan & Fallows, 2004).

Technorati, a blog tracking service, defines a blog this way:

A weblog, or blog, is a personal journal on the web. (*A blogger is a person who blogs*). Weblogs express as many different subjects and opinions as there are people writing them. Some blogs are highly influential and have enormous readership while others are primarily intended for a close circle of family and friends. The power of weblogs is that they allow millions of people to easily publish their ideas, and millions more to comment on them. Blogs are a fluid, dynamic medium, more akin to a 'conversation' than to a library — which is how the Web has often been described in the past (Westover, 2004).

A new blogger joins the blogosphere (the place in cyberspace for bloggers) every couple of minutes. About five million read blogs every day (Dominick, 2005, p. 109). One Web-based market research firm estimates that there are more than 4 million blogs. But many have been abandoned. This study is to examine a small fraction of the most popular bloggers who update their blogs at least daily, based on the particular news or political event of the moment.

Bloggers and their impact on traditional journalism

Paneth (1983, p. 239) broadly defines journalism as “the gathering, evaluation and distribution of news and information, facts and opinions of current interest.” W.E. Porter in the

International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences—a volume considered the authority on definitions in the social sciences—defines journalism this way.

Journalism is a word with a broad and varied meaning: so is “journalist.” As used in this article, the word “journalist” and “newsman” refers to a person whose primary occupation is the gathering, writing and editing of material which consists largely of the reporting or interpreting of current events (Porter, 1968, p. 265).

One could argue that bloggers satisfy Paneth’s and Porter’s definitions, a notion that dismays some traditional journalists. There is evidence of growing tension between traditional journalists and bloggers who may be redefining journalism in the digital age (Reardon, 2004).

Bloggers write about anything and anybody. Citizens, not reporters and editors, determine what is news. Some of them are equipped with camera phones, digital cameras, laptop, the Internet and easy-to-use blogging software that empowers them to become their own publishers (Gillmor as quoted by Dominick, p. 109).

This “grass-roots” citizen-based type of journalism was evident during blogger’s coverage of Sept. 11 and the days and weeks following the terrorist attacks. Bloggers who lived near the World Trade Center provided running commentary and pictures to blogs that sometimes equaled or surpassed national news media coverage (Gillmor, 2004 p. x).

But this new type of citizen-based journalism has potential pitfalls. Bloggers have no editors to check their work for accuracy, fairness, objectivity or for potential problems of libel, invasion of privacy or copyright. Moreover, those who supplement their blogging with digital cameras and camera phones may face new ethical challenges they are unprepared for, or are not aware of. Because of these concerns, some journalists, who are themselves bloggers and advocates for blogging, are providing training in journalism and ethics (Blood, 2002; Driscoll as quoted by Powell, 2003; Dube, 2003; Hiler, 2002).

In addition to affecting the culture of traditional journalism, bloggers may also be a force to be reckoned with economically. They have caught the attention of the newspaper industry, concerned about curbing a continuing decline in newspaper readership. The industry notes the threat bloggers may pose to that readership. A survey by Associated Press Managing Editors shows that 1 in 5 newspaper readers say they also read blogs (Pitts, 2004). Andy Rhinehart, new media director at the *Spartanburg Herald Journal* and *GoUpstate.com* in Spartanburg, S.C., worries that one day there will be more people going to a blog to read news than coming to his newspaper (personal interview, Oct. 10, 2004).

Some blogs already approach traditional news sources in the amount of readership. According to the blog tracker, *truthlaidbear.com*, the *Daily Kos* blog gets an average 563,771 visits per day (Bear, 2004). The blog's daily visitors are beginning to catch up with the March, 2004 daily circulation rate of 688,645 for the *New York Times* (New York Times, 2004).¹

Bloggers and their impact on politics

In November, 2004, Dan Rather, CBS News anchor, announced that he would leave the anchor desk effective March, 2005. Some credit Rather's retirement to a firestorm of controversy surrounding a September, 2004 "60 Minutes II" story on President Bush's National Guard service. Bloggers raised questions about the authenticity of a memo Rather used in the story. The memo asserted that President George Bush's commander was pressured to "sugar coat" Bush's performance as a Texas Air National Guard pilot. Rather's departure may be more evidence of bloggers' growing influence and power (Johnson, Levin, & Memmott, 2004).

In 2002, bloggers helped pressure Mississippi Senator Trent Lott to give up his post as incoming Senate Majority Leader after he made racist comments during Senator Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday celebration (Karl, 2003).

Purpose of study and research questions

The researchers became interested in the blogging phenomenon during the 2004 Presidential campaign, notably during the controversy over the “60 Minutes II” story on President Bush’s service record. “Rathergate,” as the episode became known in the blogosphere, focused attention on ethics and the media. As the blog authors drew attention to perceived ethical lapses at CBS, we were interested in the ethical landscape of the blogosphere. In light of the tremendous growth in blogs, and the impact that they are having on the mainstream news media and politics, the researchers hoped to learn more about the bloggers who reach millions of readers each day. Who are they? How do they see themselves and their role vis a vis the role of traditional journalists? Moreover, do they see themselves as journalists?

This study is significant because there has been little empirical data gathered related to what bloggers do and why. Answers to these questions may give media scholars and practitioners a clearer understanding of how journalism, thanks to the Internet, is changing.

Several research questions were developed in an effort to learn more about bloggers.

- RQ1 What do bloggers see as their role in relation to traditional journalism?
- RQ2 Where do they gather information for their blogs?

Literature Review

The history of blogging

Blogs date back to the early 1990s. Tim Berners Lee, the man considered the father of the Web, built the first blog. This blog pointed to new sites built by others that came online. In 1996, Dave Winer, a Web designer and online columnist, built a site called *24 Hours of Democracy*. He invited people on the Internet to write essays about what freedom meant to them. More than 1,000 people responded and their essays were posted on the site (Winer, 1996).

There were 23 blogs in existence by 1999. That year, Brigitte Eaton compiled a list of every blog she knew and created the Eatonweb Portal (<http://portal.eatonweb.com>). Still in existence today, it lists more than 20,000 blogs from around the world (Eaton, 2004).

With the development of free Blogger software by Pyra Labs in 1999, the number of bloggers increased dramatically. The small dot.com company in San Francisco estimated the number of bloggers that year to be in the thousands. Google, the world's largest Internet search engine, bought out Pyra in 2002, further increasing the availability and popularity of blogs (Gillmor, 2003).

Indeed. Perseus, a Web-based market research company, estimates there will be 10 million blogs on the Web by the end of 2004. Its survey of bloggers using eight hosting services like Pyra, however, found that most blogs were abandoned (Popoloski, 2003). But even that number is suspect. Perseus did not survey bloggers who posted their blogs on their own servers.

Blogs finally began to draw the attention of traditional media on Sept. 11, 2001. When the planes hit the World Trade Center Towers, people at or near the scene used camera phones and digital cameras to e-mail pictures and commentary to Web sites and blogs. They stayed with

the story, posting pictures on the Web of relatives searching for missing loved ones.² Gillmor noted the significance of that day for bloggers and the traditional news media.

But something else, something profound, was happening this time around: news was being produced by regular people who had something to say and show, and not solely by the “official” news organizations that had traditionally decided how the first draft of history would look. This time, the first draft of history was being written, in part, by the former audience. It was possible—it was inevitable—because of new publishing tools available on the Internet (Gillmor, 2004, p. ix).

Bloggers also sidetracked Mississippi Senator Trent Lott’s future political aspirations after he made racist comments during Strom Thurmond’s 100th birthday celebration. In his remarks, Lott, a Republican, suggested that the country would be better off if Thurmond, who championed segregation and states rights, had been elected president in 1948. (Karl, 2003).

Bloggers led the traditional news media in covering this story. *Wired news* reporter Noah Shachtman began his story on the bloggers who dogged Lott this way.

It's safe to assume that, before he flushed his reputation down the toilet, Trent Lott had absolutely no idea what a blog was. He may have a clue now. Internet opinion pages like [Instapundit](#), run by University of Tennessee law professor Glenn Reynolds, and [Talking Points Memo](#), from leftie political columnist Josh Marshall -- were among the first to latch on to ABCNews.com's [brief item](#) on Lott's racist comments during Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday bash. And they kept focusing on Lott's hateful past -- until the national press corps finally had to take notice (Shachtman, 2002).

The next major increase in exposure for bloggers came during the beginning of the Iraq War. Sometimes, their reports conflicted with news reports. Other times, the blogs confirmed and expanded on news media information. “Salam Pax,” the pseudonym of a blogger who lived in Baghdad, posted his comments in the weeks leading up to the invasion (Where is Raed? 2005).

Journalists also began publishing blogs. At least two embedded reporters, one from *CNN* and one from *Time Magazine*, began to blog. But editors ordered the blogs shut down (Sites, 2003, Kucera, 2003).

Additional cases of censorship, at least anecdotally, represent some degree of tension between bloggers and traditional journalists. In August, 2003, Daniel Weintraub, a political reporter for the *Sacramento Bee*, posted an item on his blog during the California gubernatorial recall election that led management to bring Weintraub's blog under the editing umbrella of the newspaper. The decision did not sit well with some bloggers (Glasser, 2003).

Later, Gregg Easterbrook, a writer for ESPN's "Tuesday Morning Quarterback" feature on *espn.com*, wrote a review of "Kill Bill," a movie by Quentin Tarantino. In the review, posted on his blog, Easterbrook made a remark critical of Jewish film producers. The remark resulted in Easterbrook being fired from ESPN (Campbell, 2003).

But none of these journalists and their affiliations with blogs got as much attention as Rather's run-in with them in September, 2004 over the famous memo about president Bush's performance with the Texas National Guard. Rather's announcement in November that he would retire as CBS News anchor in March 2005 was seen by many as another high-water mark in the influence of blogs. Media analysts say "Memogate" hurt CBS News' reputation, "especially among viewers in largely rural, conservative states — the network's core audience" (Johnson, Levin, & Memmott, 2004).

And network news types were taking notice. In October, NBC anchor Tom Brokaw lashed out at bloggers for trying to "demonize" CBS on the Internet, labeling the controversy a political jihad (Reardon, 2004).

In response to Brokaw's comments, Reynolds, host of *Instapundit.com*, responded:

Traditional journalists are getting nervous and defensive. They're responding like American automobile companies did in the 1970s. Instead of trying to improve their product, they're slamming the new competition (Reynolds, e-mail interview, Oct. 3, 2004).

Matthew Felling, media director of the non-partisan Center for Media and Public Affairs, said this of the Rather fiasco:

The rise of the bloggers is a reality check for the media elite. They are fact-checking the mainstream media. Some of them are prejudiced, but a prejudiced source is not necessarily an incorrect source (Felling as quoted by Francis, 2004).

In July, 2003, an 85-year-old driver drove a burgundy Buick LeSabre through the Santa Monica Farmer's Market at 60 miles an hour. Ten people were killed. Although he did not have a digital camera, Andy Baio scooped the national media with the tragedy by describing and writing about what he saw on his blog. Baio's office is located beside the Farmer's Market and he kept reporting on the event throughout the day (Regan, 2003).

Tom Regan was a 1992 Neiman Fellow, is the associate editor of the *Christian Science Monitor*, and is also a blogger. He discussed Baio's contribution to journalism in *Nieman Reports*.

Throughout the day, often in a personal way, Baio described the scene of carnage outside his office. Almost as affecting (and totally missed by the body-count-driven traditional media) is his description of how quickly life came back to normal on the following day, as vendors quickly set up shop again. And then at the bottom of his blog, Baio allowed his readers to post comments on what had happened. What they posted added layers to the coverage of this story; as some people raged against the elderly driver, others debated at what age should people not be allowed to drive (Regan, 2003).

In that same article, Regan noted how bloggers, led by Reynolds, played a role in forcing the *New York Times* to fire Jayson Blair after it was discovered that he had made up or plagiarized numerous articles (Regan, 2003).

Another dramatic day for bloggers, another testament to their growing influence, occurred in July 2004 when 30 of them obtained media credentials to cover the Democratic National Convention in Boston for the first time. They reported alongside mainstream journalists like Dan Rather, who also moonlighted as a blogger (Harber, 2004).

Bloggers also covered the Republican National Convention in New York City in September. Moreover, groups of journalism students-turned bloggers covered the Democratic and Republican National Conventions, as well as the Nov. 2 elections for Newsplex. This facility, located in Columbia, S.C., experiments with blogs and multi-media journalism via the Web (personal interview with Randy Covington, director of Newsplex, Oct. 28, 2004).

The blurring of the line between the journalist and a blogger is not limited to the United States. In another *Neiman Reports* article, J.D. Lasica, editor of *Online Journalism Review*, describes how the Japanese broadcasting company, NHK, used a bystander who played the role of a journalist to report on a serious highway accident using a portable camera phone. He shot pictures while talking about the accident. Mobloggers, bloggers who post photos, video and texts from mobile devices, held their first convention in Tokyo in 2003. Lasica also mentions a janitor in Daytona Beach, Fla., who created his own one-man TV station and occasionally Webcasts live events (Lasica, 2003).

Bloggers as citizen journalists

Some could argue that bloggers of today are not much different from the citizens who took up the pen more than 228 years ago to fight what they felt were unjust laws and actions by the British colonial government. Bloggers resemble the pamphleteers of the 18th century, whose writings in newspapers and pamphlets helped mold public opinion against the King of England and played a crucial role in preparing the minds of people for independence (Mott, 2000, p. 74). Mott cites as examples, the writings and publications of Benjamin Harris, John Zenger and John Holt, and other columnists, all of whom defied British colonial rule in the mid 1600s to 1700s.

This grassroots type of journalism began to disappear in the early 19th century, replaced by a staff of reporters and editors who decided what was news. In the 1830s, James Gordon Bennett organized the first newsroom and the first reporting staff at the *New York Herald*. The idea of hiring reporters and editors soon spread to other newspaper publishers (Vivian, 2002, p. 252).

Moreover, new technology that allowed for faster publication of news fostered new journalism techniques. In 1844, Samuel Morse invented Morse code and that increased the speed by which news could be reported. Reporters sent to cover the Civil War transmitted their stories back to their newspapers via the telegraph, which often broke down and resulted in major aspects of stories not being received and published. To get around the problem, reporters learned to use the inverted pyramid style and put their most important information in the first couple of paragraphs (Vivian, p. 252).

After the Associated Press was formed in 1848, editors told reporters to write just the facts and leave their personal opinions out of news stories. The quest toward objectivity was less about improving journalism and more about beating the competition. Editors wanted to make

sure stories written by AP reporters would run in papers with different political persuasions. One way to do that was for his reporters to just give the facts (Vivian, p. 253).

The 1800s laid the foundation for journalism as it is practiced today in the United States. Strive for objectivity, accuracy; use the inverted pyramid; and let the reporters and editors that you hire decide what is news (Mindich, 1998, p. 65).

Bloggers, however, challenge this foundation by returning to a narrative, opinionated style of writing. They have returned to the 1700s, when journalism was informative, grass roots and laced with opinions that came straight from the people, unfiltered by hired reporters and editors (Gillmor as quoted by Dominick, p. 109).

But some traditional journalists scoff at the notion that bloggers can do their jobs. Retired CBS News reporter Eric Engberg said the leading blogs' coverage of the Nov. 2 elections was "more reminiscent of that school paper or a "Breaker, breaker 19" gabfest on CB (citizen band radio) than anything approaching journalism." He blamed them for spreading leaked, early and inaccurate exit polling data which showed John Kerry beating George W. Bush in the race to become president (Engberg, 2004).

Toward a bloggers' ethics code

Rebecca Blood, an authority on blogs, has posted an ethics code for bloggers on her Web site that came from her book, [The Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining Your Blog](#). Among her recommendations to bloggers: link to material they reference; and publish as fact only that which you believe to be true (Blood, 2002).

Jonathan Dube (2003), online journalist and publisher of *cyberjournalist.net*, models his ethics code for bloggers after the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics. Among its provisions are to never plagiarize; identify and link to sources whenever feasible; and never publish information they know is inaccurate—and if publishing questionable material, make it clear it is in doubt.

John Hiler (2002), who dubs himself an amateur journalist, has also proposed an ethics code. He advocates that bloggers should fully disclose their agenda and background somewhere on their sites; and they should never publish information that they know not to be true.

An ethical foundation for bloggers

Bloggers struggling to establish their legitimacy can also look to the past for well-grounded ethical guidance. Citizen-based journalism is a product of the civic journalism movement that media scholar Jay Rosen helped found a little more than 10 years ago. It seeks to get journalists to “bind people to their communities, draw them into politics and public affairs, and cause them to see “the system” as theirs—public property rather than the playground of insiders or political professionals” (Rosen, p. 74). Bloggers who filled out the researchers' survey do much of the same thing on the Internet.

Journalist provides training for bloggers

In addition to providing ethical standards, efforts are also underway to teach bloggers basic journalism skills. At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab, former *Boston Globe* Editor Jack Driscoll is teaching teens and seniors how to write and publish community news using online publishing tools.

“Average citizens had no printing presses in their cellars, no broadcast networks to tap into. Now they do. It's cheap, it's fast and it's called the Internet. The major media need to figure a way to let the ‘new journalists’ under the tent” (Driscoll as quoted by Powell, 2003).

Methodology

The research questions are as follows:

- RQ1 What do bloggers see as their role in journalism?
- RQ2 Where do they gather information for their blogs?

To answer these questions, a census of the top 100 news-related weblogs (Appendix C) was conducted in October 2004. The blogs were chosen according to traffic figures as accessed on the Truth Laid Bear (TLB) “ecosystem” blog tracking site (<http://www.truthlaidbear.com/ecotraffic.php>). The Truth Laid Bear Web site was chosen because of its notoriety within the weblog community; its extensive listing of weblogs (over 4,800 as of November 2004); and its method of ranking blogs according to daily traffic as supplied by website tracking software. The Truth Laid Bear site has been tracking weblogs based on links from other weblogs for over two years. The traffic ranking system is a more recent development.

The authors obtained the e-mail addresses for the highest ranked 100 news-related weblogs from TLB traffic rankings posted Oct. 8-10, 2004 (Appendix C). Researchers assumed that bloggers who ranked in the top 100 posted news about current events, especially news about the upcoming presidential election. They also assumed that they would be updating their blogs at least daily. In fact, the census revealed that nearly 7 out of 10 updated their blogs more than twice a day. By focusing on the top 100 blogs, researchers avoided wading through thousands of other blogs that listed family or church events and were rarely updated.

These weblog authors were sent an e-mail (Appendix A) asking for their participation in an online survey consisting of 30 questions (Appendix B). The first e-mails were sent out the week of Nov. 8, with two follow-up e-mails on Thursday, Nov. 11 and Monday, Nov. 15. Several bloggers did not have e-mail addresses available, but requests were sent to them via a submission form on the weblog site. After the initial e-mail, attempts were made to correct for e-mail addresses that were no longer functioning or bounced back for some reason. In all but three cases, the authors were able to send through a second attempt without trouble. Because the survey was focused on a specific population, we did not send out requests to more bloggers, so the final population was 97. By the end of the survey time period, there were 59 responses for a 60 percent response rate. Responses were entered into the SPSS statistical package for review.

The survey questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section asked questions about general weblogging habits. The second section referred to media use and ideas about ethical behavior. The final section addressed demographic data. Because of the paucity of research on this population, this survey was mostly exploratory in nature, asking basic descriptive questions. However, the research was also particularly focused on the intersection of weblogs and journalism ethics, so a number of questions related to traditional journalistic ethical practices and how webloggers felt these practices were useful to their practice of weblogging.

Results

All but six of the respondents were male. Politically, the webloggers were evenly split between those who identified themselves as Democrats and Republicans (22 each or 43 percent). Four respondents identified as independents, and three identified as libertarians (7.8 percent and 5.9 percent respectively). Twenty-seven bloggers were between 30 and 39 years of age (52.9 percent), with another 12 bloggers (23.5 percent) between 40-49 years of age. Thirteen bloggers responded that they had worked at some point as paid, professional journalists (24.1 percent). All but one blogger that responded identified themselves as white.

Blogging Habits

Most of the bloggers had been blogging from 1 to 2 years (32 respondents or 56.1 percent). Another 16 had been blogging for 3-4 years (28.1 percent). Eight bloggers had been at it less than one year, and only one respondent had been blogging for more than four years.

Most of these bloggers also updated their weblogs frequently. Forty said they updated their weblogs more than twice a day (69 percent). Another 14 bloggers updated at least once a day (24.1 percent).

A plurality of bloggers contributed to more than one weblog (31 respondents or 53.4 percent). However, most bloggers were the sole author of their primary blog (32 or 55.2 percent).

Bloggers and Media Use

Bloggers get the information for their blog posts from a variety of sources, but 24 bloggers (51.1 percent) said they got most of their news and information from newspapers. Another nine (19.1 percent) get most of their information from other bloggers. Outside the choices given in the survey, 12 bloggers (25.1 percent) answered that they got most of their news

and information from Internet news sites, which could be Internet news portals or wire services or Internet-based newspaper sites.

Bloggers were also asked to assess the usefulness of a variety of media in gathering material for their blogs. Bloggers said the most useful media were media that had an online presence.

Table 1
Usefulness of Media for Blog Content

	Medium	Useful	Pct	Not useful	Pct
1.	Weblogs	55	98.2	1	1.8
2.	Media Websites	49	87.5	7	12.5
3.	Internet Portals	45	81.8	10	18.2
4.	Newspapers	44	78.6	12	21.4
5.	Magazines	39	69.6	17	30.4
6.	Cable News	35	62.5	20	35.7
7.	Talk Radio	20	36.4	35	63.6
8.	Radio News	17	31.5	37	68.5
9.	Network News	8	14.3	47	83.9

Also noteworthy is that network TV news was ranked “not useful” by all but 8 of the respondents, perhaps a reflection of the recent CBS News controversy.

Blogs and Journalism

Bloggers were almost universal in their belief that blogging is an important type of media. Forty-nine (90.7 percent) agreed with the statement, “Blogs are an important part of political change.” Only two bloggers disagreed with the statement. Likewise, 51 bloggers (94.4 percent) felt that bloggers’ observations strengthen democracy. Only three bloggers disagreed with that sentiment. Bloggers also were in agreement on what they consider to be an important

role: checking the work of traditional news media. Fifty of the bloggers (92.6 percent) saw this fact-checking role as an important one for bloggers. Two bloggers disagreed with that role.

With fact-checking such an important role, bloggers saw accuracy as an important value: 52 bloggers (96.3 percent) said posting accurate information on their blogs was important to them. Many (32 or 69.6 percent) felt that journalistic ethics was important to them. Six bloggers disagreed (13 percent) and 8 bloggers expressed no opinion (17.4 percent) about journalism ethics. A majority of bloggers (33 or 61.1 percent) felt bloggers should operate under a code of ethics, 12 bloggers disagreed (22.2 percent), and 9 (16.7 percent) expressed no opinion.

Despite their agreement on the importance of accuracy and ethics, bloggers did not feel they should operate under circumstances similar to traditional journalists. Forty bloggers (74.1 percent) felt bloggers who write about news events should not seek journalism training. Six bloggers (11.1 percent) felt bloggers should seek training, and eight bloggers (14.8 percent) expressed no opinion. In a similar vein, bloggers felt no need to conform to more traditional forms of journalistic objectivity. Forty-four bloggers (81.5 percent) did not feel bloggers should be objective, providing all sides of a story. Only two bloggers (3.7 percent) agreed that they should be objective in their postings.

Bloggers did not agree with editorial oversight, either. Forty-eight bloggers (88.9 percent) disagreed that someone should check over their material before it appears on the blog. Only two bloggers (3.7 percent) agreed with that statement.

In three areas, there was a split in viewpoints: whether the blogger is a journalist, the two-source rule, and how traditional journalists view bloggers. Twenty-five bloggers (46.3 percent) considered themselves journalists, while 21 (38.9 percent) disagreed with that statement about themselves. Eight bloggers did not express an opinion. Twenty-one bloggers expressed no

opinion about the two-source rule (38.9 percent), but of those who expressed agreement or disagreement, the numbers were closely split. Nineteen bloggers (35.2 percent) disagreed with the statement “Bloggers should get at least two sources to confirm information before posting it to their blogs.” But 14 bloggers (25.9 percent) agreed with that statement. Finally, 30 (56.6 percent) of the bloggers felt that traditional journalists do not respect bloggers. Ten bloggers (18.9 percent) felt traditional journalists do respect bloggers, and 13 (24.5 percent) did not express an opinion.

Discussion

At least in the highly trafficked reaches of the blogosphere, bloggers believe that what they do is an important social phenomenon, with implications for the democratic process and the media that report on them. Those among the most-read bloggers are mostly male, middle-aged and white. While critics have complained that the blogosphere is primarily a realm of conservative political involvement, our findings show that there is some diversity of voices among the highly trafficked blogs. Our population was not chosen along ideological lines, and yet an even proportion of Democrats and Republicans responded to the survey.

Despite this political diversity, bloggers were somewhat consistent in their views on blogging and its relationship to journalism ethics. These findings, however, point to some seeming contradictions within the blogosphere that deserve further study. For instance, bloggers were almost unanimous in insisting that posting accurate information was important to them, yet they were just as unanimous in disagreement about the need for a “second set of eyes” to look over information before it was published.

This may be evidence of a paradigm shift by bloggers in the way the editing function occurs. One blogger responded to the survey by remarking that it betrayed a lack of

understanding of “open-source journalism.” “Open source” is a term common among computer programmers, where a computer program is released and a community of developers will work to make the software product better. It may be that bloggers seek what journalists call “editing” after publishing the information onto their blogs. Other bloggers will expand on the information, link to it and possibly find later information that supersedes it.

However the mainstream media reacts to these bloggers, responses to our survey seem to show that the media are going to have a difficult time digesting bloggers. The bloggers’ strong view that checking the fourth estate is an “important” role seems to intimate that they do not consider traditional media models adequate to cover news in the 21st century. “We also take as part of our self-defined franchise, direct reporting on stories within our purview being neglected, bringing local reporting to a larger audience, and we are self-consciously part of a larger, increasingly dense web of citizen journalists, different from professionals, but also subject to ethical rules,” wrote one blogger. (Appendix D)

The split between those who consider themselves journalists and those who do not hints that bloggers are still trying to find their place in the media landscape. At least some bloggers view themselves in a manner consistent with the historical beginnings of American journalism. One blogger wrote in response to an open-ended question in the survey, “Bloggers are the contemporary version of the Colonial-era pamphleteers. We comment on current events and questions of policy and thus advance the national debate.” (Appendix D)

The results show that the blog universe can promote a story from within. Blog authors read other blog authors, which can have the effect of amplifying a news item beyond its original importance in the mainstream news media. This is the effect that played such a role in the Trent Lott affair. As an online publishing phenomenon, it should come as no surprise that most

bloggers rated Internet news sites (news portals, media web sites, etc.) as useful sources for information to post to their blogs. However, print media still ranked high in usefulness by a number of bloggers, even more than talk radio. In the wake of the recent CBS News scandal, bloggers showed particular disdain for network news in rating the usefulness of different media.

As this is a survey of a limited population, there are obvious limitations in these findings. The results cannot be said to represent any portion of the wider blogging population. The blogs that were ranked by the TLB ranking system were chosen during the height of a particularly vicious political season, which likely skewed the types of blogs that were ranked at times.

The results do point to several opportunities for future research: on the nature of blogging ethics, the rules of “open-source” journalism, and the self-image of bloggers as journalists. Focus should also be paid to the apparent tension between bloggers and traditional journalists. Further study should also proceed on a larger cross-section of bloggers whose blogs do not focus on current events. Do those bloggers have different views of the intersection between blogging and the media?

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APPENDIX A

E-mail letter to bloggers:

Dear bloggers,

You are part of a census of weblog authors who have been selected to participate in a survey of weblogs and mainstream journalism. This project is being conducted as part of a doctoral seminar project at the University of South Carolina in the College of Journalism and Information Studies.

You were selected as participants based on the traffic to your weblog in the Truthlaidbear.com ecosystem. One hundred weblogs were chosen for this study.

It should take no more than 8-10 minutes to complete the 30-question online survey. Your individual answers are extremely important to this study and will remain confidential. Results of your responses will be combined with the results of other bloggers within the group for summary. In the final report, data will be reported without the inclusion of details that would allow identification of you as an individual or your weblog. You will not be asked for your name, and your IP address will not be tracked or logged after you have filed your survey.

The results of this survey may be part of a published article or conference presentation. By completing this survey, you are consenting to participate in this research project and certifying that you are over 18 years of age. If you have questions about this research, you may contact us at this e-mail, or Dr. Andrea Tanner at andrea.tanner@gwm.sc.edu. For more information about your rights as a research subject, contact Thomas Coggins, director of the office of research compliance at USC, 803-777-7095.

To begin, simply click on <http://FreeOnlineSurveys.com/rendersurvey.asp?id=73798>

On some computers, you may have to copy and paste the web address into your browser.

Thank you,

Bryan Murley and Kim Smith
Ph.D. Students
University of South Carolina
School of Journalism and Mass Communication

APPENDIX B

Online Survey:

Blogger Survey 1.0

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey.
The survey consists of 30 questions and should take 5-10 minutes to complete.

These questions are designed to learn more about your blogging habits.

1) How long have you been blogging?

Less than 1 year

1-2 years

3-4 years

5+ years

2) How often do you update your blog?

Less than once a week

Once a week

2-3 times a week

Once a day

Twice a day

More than twice a day

3) Do you contribute to more than one blog?

Yes

No

4) If you do contribute to more than one blog, how many?

2-3

3-4

5-6

7 or more

5) On the main blog you write for, are there other authors who contribute besides yourself?

Yes

No

6) From which state (or nation other than the U.S.) does your personal blog originate?

These questions are designed to garner information about your attitudes and objectives in blogging.

7) The primary purpose of my blog is to _____

Comment on current events

Report on current events
Keep my family and friends informed about me
Post prose and poetry
Other (Please Specify):

8) I get most of my news and information for my blog from_____.

Other bloggers
Gossip
Network TV news
Cable News
Radio news
Talk Radio
Newspapers
Magazines

Other (Please Specify):

9) Rate these media outlets in terms of their usefulness to you in gathering information for your weblog:

very useful	somewhat useful	not very useful	Not useful at all
Weblogs			
Network Television News			
Cable Television News			
Radio News			
Talk Radio			
Internet News Portals (like Yahoo!)			
Media Websites			
Newspapers			
Magazines			

The following statements are designed to gauge your attitudes about blogging and journalism. Please respond to each statement.

10) Blogs are an important part of political change.

Strongly Agree
Agree
No Opinion
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

11) I consider myself a journalist.

Strongly agree
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Strongly disagree

12) Bloggers should get at least two sources to confirm information before posting it to their blogs.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

13) Bloggers who write about news events should seek journalism training.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- No opinion
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

14) It's important for someone else other than myself to check over my material before it is posted on my blog.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- No opinion
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

15) Posting accurate information on my blog is important to me.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- No opinion
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

16) Bloggers should be objective, which includes providing all sides of a story.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

17) Bloggers should operate under a code of ethics.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- No opinion
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

18) Bloggers should be concerned about using camera phones responsibly.

Strongly agree
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Strongly disagree

19) Journalism ethics are important to me.

Strongly agree
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Not familiar with journalism ethics

20) I am familiar with blogger's codes of ethics that exist on the Internet.

Yes
No

21) Bloggers strengthen democracies through their observations about current events.

Strongly agree
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Strongly disagree

22) An important role of a blogger is to check the work of traditional news media.

Strongly agree
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Strongly disagree

23) Traditional journalists respect bloggers.

Strongly agree
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Strongly disagree

24) What is the role of a blogger in American society?

These questions are designed to gather basic demographic information about you.

25) What is your gender?

Male
Female

26) What is your age?

27) What is your racial identity?

Asian

Black

Hispanic

Native American

White

Other (Please Specify):

28) Have you ever worked as a paid, professional journalist?

29) How would you describe your political affiliation?

Democrat

Independent

Libertarian

Republican

Other (Please Specify):

30) What is the field you currently are employed in?

Journalism

Higher Education

K-12 Education

Publishing

Military Service

Engineering

Sciences

Clerical

Small Business owner

Consulting

Marketing

Public Relations

Politics

Computer Science

Other (please specify):

APPENDIX C:

List of blog contacted for the census, ranked with average daily visits

1. Daily Kos (www.dailykos.com)
2. lpundit@instapundit.com Instapundit.com 216319 visits/day (1)
3. atrios@comcast.net / Eschaton 171211 visits/day (5)
4. andrewmsullivan@aol.com www.AndrewSullivan.com - [Daily Dish](http://DailyDish) 93647 visits/day (7)
5. powerlinefeedback@gmail.com [Power Line](http://PowerLine) 94008 visits/day (8)
6. terry@suck.com Wonkette 110986 visits/day (35)
7. hhewitt@hughhewitt.com HughHewitt.com 75057 visits/day (23)
8. editors@washingtonmonthly.com [The Washington Monthly](http://TheWashingtonMonthly) 77777 visits/day (10)
9. thebloggingcaesar@electionprojection.com [Election Projection - 2004 Edition](http://ElectionProjection-2004Edition) 60861 visits/day (203)
10. tips@gawker.com Gawker 63971 visits/day (187)
11. contact@SmirkingChimp.com [The Smirking Chimp](http://TheSmirkingChimp) 56748 visits/day (387)
12. tips@politicalwire.com [Taegan Goddard's Political Wire](http://TaeganGoddard'sPoliticalWire) 52005 visits/day (95)
13. polipundit@fastmail.fm PoliPundit.com 48235 visits/day (135)
14. mail@mydd.com [MyDD :: Due Diligence of Politics, Election Forecast & the World Today](http://MyDD::DueDiligenceofPolitics,ElectionForecast&theWorldToday) 41139 visits/day (165)
15. GAWKER DELETED
16. info@democracyforamerica.com [Blog for America](http://BlogforAmerica) 33746 visits/day (336)
17. pandagon@gmail.com pandagon.net - pandagon.com on the internets 19808 visits/day (49)
18. [Belmont Club](http://BelmontClub) 18710 visits/day (36)
19. volokh@law.ucla.edu [The Volokh Conspiracy](http://TheVolokhConspiracy) - 21247 visits/day (11)
20. drwissing@starpower.net [The Hedgehog Report](http://TheHedgehogReport) 12001 visits/day (612)
21. allahpundit@aol.com [Allah Is In The House](http://AllahIsInTheHouse) 13169 visits/day (38)
22. alan@command-post.org [The Command Post - A Newsblog Collective](http://TheCommandPost-ANewsblogCollective) 14179 visits/day (13)
23. talkleft@aol.com) [TalkLeft: The Politics of Crime](http://TalkLeft:ThePoliticsofCrime) 15149 visits/day (44)
24. eff@buzzmachine.com [BuzzMachine ... by Jeff Jarvis](http://BuzzMachine...byJeffJarvis) 9250 visits/day (55)
25. contact@liberaloasis.com LiberalOasis 9173 visits/day (197)
26. drjjoyner@gmail.com [Outside The Beltway](http://OutsideTheBeltway) 8769 visits/day (41)
27. dailyrecycler@gmail.com [The Daily Recycler: Bush Winks at Crowd After Interruption by Protester](http://TheDailyRecycler:BushWinksatCrowdAfterInterruptionbyProtester) 7302 visits/day (6429)
28. mypetiawa@yahoo.com [Murdered Hostages](http://MurderedHostages) 7211 visits/day (12634)
29. seanpaul@agonist.org [The Agonist | thoughtful, global, timely](http://TheAgonist|thoughtful,global,timely) 7186 visits/day (289)
30. ltsmash@cox.net [Citizen Smash - The Indepundit](http://CitizenSmash-TheIndepundit) 7108 visits/day (42)
31. oliver@oiverwillis.com [Oliver Willis | Like Kryptonite To Stupid](http://OliverWillis|LikeKryptoniteToStupid) 7040 visits/day
32. aceofspadeshq@yahoo.com [Ace of Spades HQ](http://AceofSpadesHQ) 6378 visits/day (116)
33. blogsofwar@gmail.com [Blogs of War](http://BlogsOfWar) 6234 visits/day (79)
34. joe@windsofchange.Net [Winds of Change.NET](http://WindsOfChange.NET) 6139 visits/day (24)
35. blackfive@gmail.com BLACKFIVE 5648 visits/day (48)

36. tball@politicalstrategy.org [Political Strategy - Politics, Strategies, Tactics, News and Opinion](#) 5582 visits/day (1646)
37. Andrew@thepoorman.net [The Poor Man](#) 4839 visits/day (170)
38. fred@rantburg.com [Rantburg: Millions for Defense, but Not One Cent for Tribute!](#)
39. profbainbridge@aol.com [ProfessorBainbridge.com](#) 4243 visits/day (104)
40. mike@strykernews.com [Stryker Brigade News](#) 4322 visits/day (2937)
41. dneiwert@hotmail.com <http://dneiwert.blogspot.com/>
42. correnteblog@yahoo.com <http://corrente.blogspot.com/>
43. rooftopreport@gmail.com <http://www.rooftopreport.com/>
44. froggyruminations@gmail.com [Froggy Ruminations](#) 3612 visits/day (754)
45. E-mail form located at <http://www.gando.net/Default.aspx?tabid=1>
<http://www.gando.net/default.aspx?tabid=38> 3557 visits/day (488)
46. author@victorhanson.com <http://www.victorhanson.com/> 3497 visits/day (286)
47. E-mail form at <http://books.dreambook.com/froomkin/imguest.sign.html>
[Discourse.net: On the fringes of the public sphere](#) 3365 visits/day (430) 3252 visits/day (92)
48. appellateblog@hotmail.com [How Appealing](#) 3320 visits/day (12907)
49. Mark@mydomainname.com <http://www.markarkleiman.com/> 3295 visits/day (141)
50. bill@punditguy.com [punditguy](#) 2896 visits/day (4010)
51. mshaw@bagnews.com [BAGnewsNotes](#) 2625 visits/day (4188)
52. tips@bushout.tv [BushOut.TV: 2004 Campaign Ad News](#) 2612 visits/day (2508)
53. KerryHaters@cdwebs.com [Kerry Haters](#) 2557 visits/day (1204)
54. vagrant@slumdance.com [Brian Flemming's Weblog](#) 2365 visits/day (2535)
55. jbc@west.net [lies.com](#) 2324 visits/day (3257)
56. editor@californiarepublic.org [Patterico's Pontifications](#) 2222 visits/day (253)
57. michaeltotten001@yahoo.com <http://michaeltotten.com/> 2221 visits/day (156)
58. tlmtips@usefulwork.com [Oh, That Liberal Media](#) 2213 visits/day (435)
59. MadSwede10@aol.com [Viking Pundit](#) 2179 visits/day (208)
60. da@usprogressives.org [OurCongress.org :: Restoring Democracy to the House](#) 2104 visits/day (3298)
61. kuff@offthekuff.com [Off the Kuff](#) 2009 visits/day (408) This is a blog that focuses on regional news and political issues.
62. davecullen@earthlink.net [Conclusive Evidence--of Dave Cullen's existence](#) 1999 visits/day (10470)
63. jharrell@mac.com [The Shape of Days](#) 1999 visits/day (1712)
64. E-mail form at <http://www.diggersrealm.com/contact/> [Diggers Realm](#) 1901 visits/day (828)
65. unfutz@vahoogroups.com [ed fitzgerald's unfutz](#) 1811 visits/day (2648)
66. vdav@worldnetdaily.com [Vox Popoli](#) 1809 visits/day (417)
67. ihatefreedom@sadlyno.com [Sadly, No!](#) 1755 visits/day (562)
68. polstateme@polstate.com [Political State Report: straight from the trenches .:. Campaign 2004](#) 1691 visits/day (326)
69. angrybear@gmail.com [Angry Bear](#) 1663 visits/day (482)

70. steveslr@aol.com [Steve Sailer - Published Articles and Blog on Human Biodiversity, Genetics, Sports, Race, Gender, I](#) 1645 visits/day (2105)
71. archpundit@yahoo.com [ArchPundit](#) 1632 visits/day (1733)
72. asaf76@yahoo.com [Burnt Orange Report](#) 1627 visits/day (741)
73. jordanapril11-blog@yahoo.com <http://www.politopics.com/> (this blog was not found on truthlaidbear.com. but it found it interesting. Perhaps it should be included)
74. brainhop@brainhop.com [brainhop | daily offbeat news stories around the world.](#) 1584 visits/day (12038)
75. bill@billroggio.com [the fourth rail](#) 1502 visits/day (681)

75 A Small Victory - Michele@asmallvictory.net

76. skippybkroo@aol.com [skippy the bush kangaroo](#) 1516 visits/day (192)
 77. steven@poliblogger.com [PoliBlog](#) 1498 visits/day (96)
 78. aarons-rantblog@la4israel.org [Aaron's Rantblog, aka Aaron the Liberal Slayer](#) 1478 visits/day (39)
 79. layne@tabloid.net [KEN LAYNE](#) 1449 visits/day (324)
 80. contact@nathannewman.org [NathanNewman.org - News and Views](#) 1436 visits/day (246)
 81. jrosenbe@brynmawr.edu [Discriminations](#) 1385 visits/day (806)
 82. inteldump@gmail.com [INTEL DUMP](#) 1349 visits/day (1243)
 83. damianpenny@gmail.com [Daimnation!](#) 1334 visits/day (287)
 84. sladillard@gmail.com [Southern Appeal](#) 1331 visits/day (173)
 85. joanne@nameofmyblog.com [joannejacobs.com](#) 1319 visits/day (267)
 86. slacktivist@hotmail.com [slacktivist](#) 1312 visits/day (579)
 87. SlantPoint@Gmail.com [Slant Point](#) 1308 visits/day (283)
 88. quiddity_q@lycos.com (Put Q in the subject line as a signal that this is not spam.) [uggabugga](#) 1295 visits/day (308)
 89. dodd@cdharris.net [Iipse Dixit - Try some. It's good for you.](#) 1240 visits/day (155)
 90. iraqnowblog@hotmail.com <http://iraqnow.blogspot.com/>
 91. jesse@wage-slave.org [The Wage Slave Journal](#) 1233 visits/day (1828)
 92. yuppieskum@gmail.com [The People's Republic of Seabrook](#) 1231 visits/day (330)
 93. mattsoon@smart.net [Just a Bump in the Beltway](#) 1223 visits/day (1057)
 94. avedon@cix.co.uk [The Sideshow](#) 1204 visits/day (403)
 95. plastic@gmail.com [Michael Williams -- Master of None](#) 1141 visits/day (496)
 96. weblog_bubba@hotmail.com [Slings And Arrows](#) 1127 visits/day (351)
 97. slybri957@aol.com [John Kerry for President? You Must Be Joking](#) 1104 visits/day (2480)
 98. tex.mac@gmail.com [UnFairWitness](#) 1104 visits/day (2316)
 99. seetheforest@nuthouse.com [Seeing The Forest - a Weblog of Politics](#) 1080 visits/day (259)
 100. PassionateAmerica@cox.net [Passionate America](#) 1053 visits/day (68)
-