The Status of Journalistic Routines within Reporter-Run Political Blogs

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ABSTRACT
The present research explores the relationships between newspaper circulation size (small vs. large), blog post focus (national vs. local/state), and blog post topic (political vs. government) and whether reporters who blog produce posts that break with journalistic routines or include references to the author. Analysis of 960 blog posts from nine newspapers suggests that smaller newspapers were more likely to produce posts that break with journalistic routines and include self-references than larger newspapers. Posts that focused on national news were more likely to break with journalistic routines but were not more likely to include self-references. Posts about political news were more likely to both break with journalistic routines and to include self-references.

Keywords: Blogging, Journalism, Newspapers, Objectivity, Routines

INTRODUCTION
Technology, in particular the Internet, has offered many industries a host of new opportunities. The World Wide Web provided a new outlet for companies to market themselves, leveled the playing field between the mom-and-pop shops and the big box stores, and delivered millions of new customers that no sidewalk sale could (Schwartz, 1999). However, some industries have been slow or perhaps even reluctant to adopt new technologies. Research has shown that newspapers in particular have been less than zealous in embracing the full potential of the Internet (Maier, 2000; Reich, 2005). However, one facet of the Internet has become common-place in most newsrooms: blogging (Robinson, 2006). Yet the nature of the journalist-run blog, dubbed “j-blog,” is still a matter of some debate among researchers.

Journalism traditions and newsroom practices, in essence, the routines of the profession, hold significant sway over how journalists approach new situations (Lowrey, 2006a; Tuchman, 1978). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that such routines would be applied to the Internet and its many facets as journalists transition towards its adoption. In fact, research has shown that journalists are carrying over many of their professional routines into the blogosphere (Cassidy, 2006; Singer, 2005). However, other researchers have suggested that j-blogs are changing the profession and the status quo (Robinson, 2006). Therefore, ques-
tions remain as to whether this relatively new, Internet-based arm of newspapers is truly an innovation or another example of doing things the way they have always been done. “Dissecting each blog for its compliance to professional norms and values provides an answer to whether these blogs could be called journalism, or if they are assuming a new form to meet the needs and desires of a new, postmodern society” (Robinson, 2006, p. 66). The present paper attempts to answer this question by analyzing political j-blogs to determine how closely the journalist bloggers adhere to the routines of their profession in terms of news content.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The State of the News Media report for 2008, produced by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, indicates that circulation, advertising, earnings and staff have all declined at newspapers across the nation. Conversely, the number of news and information outlets has increased dramatically. Each year the report is compiled, the percentage of people who say they turn to the Internet for news increases. In 2007, 71% of Americans went online for news. For an industry devoted to the dissemination of news as newspapers are, these figures are noteworthy and demand attention.

Blogs are one of the many outlets for news and information that Web surfers have at their fingertips. To understand blogging, it is necessary to contemplate its meaning. Although there are many views on the subject, Walker (2003) provides a succinct yet encompassing definition.

A weblog, or blog, is a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first. Typically, weblogs are published by individuals and their style is personal and informal. . . . Examples of the genre exist on a continuum from confessional, online diaries to logs tracking specific topics or activities through links and commentary (para. 4).

Research suggests print journalists remain suspicious of blogs and may even reject their validity or legitimacy outright (Cassidy, 2007; Chung, Kim, Trammel, & Porter 2007; Gladney, Shapiro, & Castaldo, 2007). Nevertheless, blogging has found its way into the profession. Lowrey and Mackay (2008) found that news sites with blogs grew from 33% to 61% between April 2005 and March 2006. Additionally in 2006, 37% of those sites hosted more than six blogs. Trammel and Keshelashvili (2005) found that traditional journalists often consult bloggers as third-party experts. They also found that 51% of journalists read blogs regularly and 53% of journalists use blogs to obtain story ideas and sources. “Though distinct from professional journalism, blogs are seen as a complementary form of ‘participatory media’ that, if done well, can enhance connections between journalists and the communities they serve” (Singer, 2005, pp. 173-174). In addition, editors expect reporters to include blogging in their daily activities (Singer, 2005; Robinson, 2006). A 2007 survey of 585 journalists conducted by the Princeton Survey Research Associates on behalf of the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and the Project for Excellence in Journalism showed that journalists’ opinions of blogs might be softening. The report revealed that 50% of all national journalists, 56% of all local journalists, and 69% of all online journalists believed that hosting their own blogs is good for the profession.

Perhaps part of journalism’s residual resistance to blogs and bloggers is due to a clash of conventions. Even online journalists see a difference between themselves and bloggers. Gladney, Shapiro, and Castaldo (2007) surveyed 723 editors of online news sites with direct ties to traditional print or broadcast news sources and asked them to rank the importance of 38 criteria. The criteria of “editorial vigor,” meaning the site takes a stand or has a point of view, and “outside commentary,” meaning the site’s includes opinions from outside sources, ranked the lowest.
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