Chapter 15

Social Interaction Technologies and the Future of Blogging

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ABSTRACT

In an age of user-generated content, multimedia sharing sites, and customized news aggregators, an assortment of Internet-based social interaction technologies transforms the Web and its users. A quintessential embodiment of social interaction technologies, blogs are widely used by people across diverse geographies to locate information, create and share content, initiate conversations, and collaborate and interact with others in various settings. This chapter surveys the global blogosphere landscape for the latest trends and developments in order to evaluate the overall direction that blogging might take in the future. The author posits that network-based peer production and social media convergence are the driving forces behind the current transformation of blogs. The participatory and inclusive nature of social interaction technologies makes blogging a medium of choice for disseminating user-driven content and particularly suitable for bottom-up grassroots initiatives, creativity, and innovation.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As we move into the 21st century, a new generation of Internet technologies transforms the information landscape and previously established media usage patterns. Social interaction technologies, or Internet-based tools and techniques designed to initiate, share, and maintain interactive and collaborative activities online (Dumova & Fiordo, 2010), have penetrated multitudinous aspects of people’s lives. When applied to the realm of media and communication, these technologies are commonly referred to as social media and include weblogs, microblogs, social networks, wikis, discussion forums, audio and video podcasts, Web feeds, social bookmarking services, and virtual
worlds. The term “blogging” refers to the practice of publishing user-generated content on the Web in a journal-type format that can be easily updated and commented on. Blogs permit people to engage in social interactions, build connections, maintain conversations, share ideas, and collaborate with others. Above all, blogs and blogging advance the creation of user-centered, user-driven, and user-distributed content.

Social media development concurs with the grand vision of the World Wide Web as “more a social creation than a technical one” (Berners-Lee, 1999, p. 133). To draw attention to the paradigm shift in how Internet users collaborate and share content online, the concept of Web 2.0 was introduced (O’Reilly, 2005). However, there is no separation barrier between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0; rather, there is a symbiosis of emerging and already-established Internet technologies. There are many definitions of social media and most of them emphasize the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Powered by new technologies with blogging at their core, social media are taking the world by surprise. A recent worldwide poll conducted by a global media planning and marketing company, Universal McCann, demonstrates that the social media universe is growing exponentially. The primary adopters and participants of social media are more than 600 million active Internet users who go online every day in various parts of the world (Wave 4 Social Media Tracker, 2009). Reading and writing blogs remain the most common social media activities, along with managing personal profiles, visiting friends’ social network pages, sending and reading short messages, sharing photos, and watching and uploading video clips (Wave 5 Social Media Tracker, 2010). It is not accidental that the website hosting the popular blog service Blogger (blogspot.com) is the world’s fifth most visited site after Google, Facebook, YouTube, and Yahoo.

In just one decade, blogging has taken off and become nearly omnipresent with millions of blogs published worldwide. There are numerous blog classifications: public blogs and those hidden beyond the intranet firewalls (private or limited access), single-authored blogs and multi-authored, or collective blogs. Blogs differ by ownership (personal, organizational, or corporate), by genre (political, educational, sports, military, law, current events, fashion, “mommy” blogs, etc.), by multimedia type (photo, video, and audio blogs), and by platform (moblogs). The origin of blogs as communication systems is mired in the history of Usenet groups and the Bulletin Board Systems of the 1980s, as well as the first World Wide Web communities of the 1990s. Early self-expressive websites gave birth to a well-known dimension of blogs as a cyber-equivalent of a personal diary. The adoption of WWW brought popularity to the collections of hyperlinks, which users composed, updated, and shared with one another. These linklogs became common and there was just one step from a linklog to a linkblog (link plus commentary) and finally to a weblog. In essence, “personal foraging sites” (Blood, 2000, p. 20) merged with personal Web pages, and the rest was history. Ultimately, hyperlinks and self-expression defined the nature of blogs and turned blogging into the medium that we know today.

The concise history of blogging pioneers still has to be written by Internet historians. However, there are several innovations that separate modern blogging from the early days. Among them, the incorporation of trackbacks by the MovableType blog publishing platform and the introduction of the commenting feature in the Open Diary blog hosting service. On its first day of operation Open Diary had twelve visitors; three of them started their own diaries. One of the three users happened to be from Turkey (Locken & Loughmane, 2005, p. 291), an early signal that blogging was destined to become a global enterprise. In 1999 the introduction of Pitas.com’s and Blogger.com’s easy-to-use and free blog hosting and publishing services made the blogging revolution inevitable. Interestingly enough, its vanguard was located in
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