

Are Blogs Changing the News Values of Newspaper Reporters?

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Abstract

Traditional news outlets such as newspapers are incorporating blogs as part of their content in an effort to reach new audiences. Because blogs are typically opinionated and personal how newspapers present their blogs could indicate a shift from traditional journalism values. This content analysis sought to investigate several categories (news, sports, politics and entertainment) of newspaper blogs in terms of personal opinion/commentary, attribution and transparency. Results indicate that reporters have not yet abandoned traditional news values, but rather treat their blogs as a different news platform.

Introduction

The definition of news appears to be as wide as the scope of the people or organizations defining it. Schramm defined news as “an attempt to reconstruct the essential framework of the event,”¹ while The Hutchins Commission² labeled news as “important new information.” During the mid-1960s, Gieber³ classified news as “what newspapermen make it,” which suggests an agenda-setting function. In the modern news environment, this last definition has resurfaced, albeit with a twist. Bogner posits that existing within a hypercompetitive environment,⁴ in which news is a commodity, corporate media increasingly define news. This shift in who defines news has far reaching ramifications. McManus argued that a conflict exists between the “media corporation’s interest in maximizing profit and a journalist’s obligation to maximize public understanding.”⁵

According to Hume,⁶ changing media technologies have assaulted both the values and economics of traditional journalism, with the result that these media no longer maintain a monopoly over the flow of information. Increasingly, citizen journalists have taken an active roll in gathering and disseminating

information to the public.⁷Papper⁸ reported that not only are younger audiences increasingly turning to online news sources, but regardless of age more than 40% of the public has an interest in creating its own newscast and more than 60% want more interaction with television news. Some researchers⁹ suggest this content rivals the traditional news media.

However, many journalists view these developments as threats to traditional journalistic values such as objectivity and credibility.¹⁰ According to Ron Nessen, former NBC News reporter and press secretary for President Gerald Ford, "The Internet makes everybody a journalist. You sit at your computer, you type something that is true, not true, partially true, hit the button and it goes out around the world."¹¹ With blogging, for example, information is often presented as biased personal opinion with little to no attribution of sources. In essence, blogs contradict the traditional journalistic practices of unbiased reporting of news events. Recent data suggest that 62% of working journalists believe that journalism is headed in the wrong direction, in part because of these concerns.¹² In the past decade, the public trust in media and their credibility has also declined,¹³ while Melican and Dixon¹⁴ found that people perceived non-traditional Internet sources as less credible than all other news sources.

Despite these issues, the traditional media have begun to incorporate online material and blogging as part of their content offerings.¹⁵ McManus¹⁶ argues that news managers will ignore social responsibilities that conflict with business interests and force journalists to adapt to new roles. Thus, journalists may have to accept lower standards of credibility and objectivity to meet the demands of the new media environment. This has already been noted in the case of blogging, where a majority of news managers instituted the practice without communicating with their journalists or considering their reactions.¹⁷ This study seeks to extend that line of research by looking at the specific content of the blogs produced by journalists at these mainstream media. Have reporters moved away from traditional notions of objectivity and started incorporating more opinion and commentary in their blogs?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

A combined theoretical framework of Cognitive Dissonance and the Economic Theory of News Selection was applied to this study. Cognitive Dissonance¹⁸ includes the notion of forced compliance, in which dissonance occurs "when individuals are forced to publicly behave in a manner contrary to that individual's privately held beliefs."¹⁹ If provided either a promise of reward or threat of punishment, individuals can rationalize this behavior and thus overcome the dissonance. As witnessed in previous studies,²⁰ journalists who object to blogging displayed attributes of forced dissonance. However, the promise of reward (additional pay) or threat of punishment (loss of job) allows these journalists the opportunity to conform to managerial wishes.

The source of this forced dissonance can be found in McManus' Economic Theory of News Selection. McManus²¹ described news as a commodity in which "the event being covered is inversely proportional to the cost of coverage and is proportional to expected audience appeal." In regards to cost efficiency, media reporters' blogs could be used as another platform to communicate news that already is being covered. Furthermore, McManus argued that the financial well-being of the news corporation determined news content and delivery. A prime example of this ideology is found in Altschull's modification of the Four Theories of the Press, in which he stated that "media content reflects the interests of those who finance the press."²²

Media Trends

Many news consumers, and especially the young, are moving away from the traditional media and toward new media technologies. Online consumption of video material rose 66% between 2007 and 2008, and YouTube owned a third of the 10 billion online video views in February 2008; that compared to CNN.com's 133 million views or 1.3%.²³ According to Tom Rosenstiel, the director for the Project in Excellence in Journalism, "I don't know whether it's five years or 10 years or 15 years, but at some point, old media will be fully online."²⁴

These shifts have helped create an economic upheaval for the mainstream news media. In the past three years American newspapers have lost slightly more than 40% of their market value creating "a palpable sense of doom" among newspapers.²⁵ According to Crosbie, "Many believe these trends, if unchecked, herald a death knell for the printed newspaper industry."²⁶ Partly in response, newspapers across the country have had to eliminate jobs. In 2008, the Seattle Times announced cuts of 190 jobs, while The New York Times eliminated 100 newsroom positions through buyouts and layoffs.²⁷ One newspaper executive facing another round of mandated staff reductions observed, "I'm past bleeding; we're into amputations now."²⁸

These issues are having an effect on "the quality of news coverage, and the flagging credibility of the news media."²⁹ Journalists who have become online content producers have expressed concerns over the "lack of emphasis on the kind of journalism that will be produced."³⁰ The pressure to upload more content at a faster rate results in traditional reporters placing "unedited notes instantly into their online news systems."³¹ As a result, journalists' credibility with the public continues to erode. The percentage of the public with a "great deal" or "some" confidence in the press has declined from 88% in 1970 to 57% in 2002.³² The threat from new media, economics and credibility seemed to be tied together:

The surface evidence suggests a classic death spiral or reinforcing process.

Waning confidence in the press causes lower readership, which reduces profits, which limits the

availability of resources for the editorial product, causing confidence to fall still more. Given limited resources by their publishers and owners, [media managers] remain mostly frozen at the wheel while both readership and confidence in the press decline steeply and consistently.³³

Blogs

A blog is a form of content in which the content creator produces stories, opinions and commentaries, often in real time, that afford consumers the opportunity to offer their own opinions.³⁴ Bloggers are those who write or contribute to a blog. As of April 2007, there were more than 70 million blogs and the blogosphere is over 60 times as big as it was three years ago and doubles in size roughly every six months.³⁵ There are 75,000 new blogs added every day, which means that on average, a new blog is created every second of every day.

In 2006, 80% of the top 100 U.S. newspapers provided at least one reporter blog, and by 2008 that figure had increased to 95%.³⁶ The number of unique visitors to blog pages on the 10 most popular newspaper sites grew 210% from December 2005 to December 2006. Collectively, those visitors made up 13% of total traffic to these Web sites.³⁷ Increasingly, the American public expects blogs to play a prominent role in news delivery. Around 55% believe blogging will be an important aspect of journalism in the future, while 74% say amateur citizen reporters, not the established media outlets, will play a key role.³⁸

By nature, blogs are intended to be personal, subjective and opinionated,³⁹ which puts them at odds with traditional journalistic values. "Blogging as it has evolved has been very different from conventional reporting," says Jane Kirtley, a professor of media ethics and law at the University of Minnesota. "Blogs are not intended to be objective. They are supposed to be opinionated, snarky and in your face—and that's not the way the mainstream media usually goes about reporting."⁴⁰ Thus, blogging threatens traditional journalism credibility, reputation and public perception.⁴¹ Hayes, Singer and Ceppos⁴² argue that journalists gain credibility and reputation through their media outlets, and that the public views the work as coming from the organization, not the individual reporter. This suggests that it could be professionally damaging for mainstream journalists to engage in blogging. More local journalists say online activities such as blogging will weaken (45%) rather than strengthen (34%) traditional journalism values.⁴³

Journalist job roles and resistance to change

One of the earliest studies on journalist work roles noted that most journalists were a combination of a neutral role, with an emphasis on objectivity and verifiable information, and an investigative role, with an emphasis on questioning government and official sources.⁴⁴ Over the next 30 years a series of

follow-up studies⁴⁵ showed only slight modifications to these categories. In 2006, journalists still placed a high value on the investigative/interpretive role and a majority of journalists still felt it extremely important to avoid reporting stories with unverified facts.⁴⁶

How journalists perceive their own roles is important, because they have traditionally relied on ingrained work roles and habits, and resisted changes to these routines.⁴⁷ Daniels and Hollifield⁴⁸ found that newsroom professionals react to change with resistance and negativity. Giles⁴⁹ argued that journalists resist change because it threatens traditions and news routines. In their case study of newspaper management strategies, Gade and Perry⁵⁰ noted that journalists did not evaluate the changes as positive, even though they had a greater stake in managerial decisions.

Related to the present study, research⁵¹ has indicated a resistance on the part of journalists to embrace blogging. Some of this resistance is related to the fact that most journalists who had begun blogging did not receive extra time or compensation for the work. According to one newspaper journalist, "I bet 95% of [journalists] who have been forced to blog don't get paid an extra penny for doing it. That means we've added an extra story per day ... with no raise at all."⁵² Hull⁵³ notes, "In an era of dwindling resources, shrinking staffs and buyouts, few newsrooms have the time or the bodies to edit the avalanche of online content. Editing blogs, with their constant updating and reader comments, adds another two-ton pile of work. This would suggest that in terms of the cognitive dissonance framework, journalists are more likely responding to the threat of punishment rather than the promise of reward. Threats to credibility were also cited by journalists. "I think [the] practice of hearsay journalism is creeping into the mainstream," said one journalist. "Hopefully, the traditional media can get a grip on blogging and gravitate back to substance."⁵⁴

Research Questions

The theoretical background and literature review suggested the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the level of opinion writing in journalists' blogs produced by traditional news media outlets?

Opinion writing was defined as writing related to how the author felt or thought about the subject he or she wrote about. An opinion-based story would be more likely to lack attribution, which for this study was defined as published reference, support or credit to support a claim or statement. Opinion might also be related to transparency and interactivity. In blogging, transparency means the inclusion of web-links within a blog post. Thus, lower levels of transparency would suggest higher levels of opinion because the reader might be less likely to know where the material or information comes from. Interactivity was defined as reporters asking readers to either respond or engage in the blog

conversation.

RQ2: Does the level of opinion writing within journalists' blogs differ by content category?

The researchers defined content category as four general topics: political, sports, general news, and entertainment. These are the most topics that most consistently appear in mainstream media news programs, and are also the most popular blog topics.⁵⁵

RQ3: Do demographic variables correlate to opinion based writing in journalists' blogs? The measured demographic variables in the study included circulation size, gender, and geographic location.

Method

This study employed a conceptual analysis of media-sponsored blogs written by journalists in U.S. newspapers. Similar to a content analysis by Danielson and Adams,⁵⁶ a sophisticated multistage sampling procedure was applied to this study. A probability sample was created using Internet and industry sources⁵⁷ and was based on the population of print journalists currently involved in blogging at these papers. The researchers examined each media outlet's website to determine which outlets provided blogs. In the second sampling stage, the authors incorporated a stratified sampling procedure. Newspapers with blogging journalists were divided into three separate categories based on circulation size (small: <25,000, medium: 25,000-100,000, and large: >100,000+). Reinard⁵⁸ ranked individual categories and then randomly selected cases within each category in order to guarantee a balanced representation of the content being analyzed. Therefore, to ensure a balanced selection of newspapers, an nth-series list was created using every third paper in each category (third stage-systematic sampling). The researchers randomly selected a period of coding after the November election to better represent a typical news cycle. The time period for the content analysis covered December 7-13, 2008. Because the composite week is more effective than random or consecutive day sampling,⁵⁹ an average of 7 different papers were coded each day during the week of analysis. In total, the nth-series list provided for 22 large size circulation papers, 18 medium size circulation papers, and 7 small size circulation papers.

As noted, the categories of analysis included politics, sports, general news and entertainment blogs. Entertainment blogs were defined as blogs dealing with subjects relating to arts, theater, restaurant dining, movies, music, travel and local calendar events. Political blogs were defined as blogs dealing with subjects relating to civil administration or government (including those elected to or running for political office, press secretaries, citizens voicing political opinions, and bills or laws). Sports blogs were defined as blogs dealing with subjects relating to any individual or group competitive activity involving physical exertion or skill, governed by rules. If a category included more than one reporter blogging,

then every other reporter's blog was included for analysis starting with the first blog posted. This yielded 699 sports blogs (413 large papers, 235 medium papers, and 51 small papers), 177 political blogs (87 large papers, 67 medium papers, and 23 small papers), 291 entertainment blogs (169 large papers, 112 medium papers, and 10 small papers), and 272 general news blogs (171 large papers, 75 medium papers, and 26 small papers). In all, a total of 1,440 reporters' blogs were included in the media content analysis; 329 female reporters and 1,111 male reporters.

Coders

Two independent coders with prior content analysis experience conducted the coding. The coders were trained based on a standardized coding sheet and coded the data independently of each other. The coders conducted a pretest with the content protocol prior to the second week of December 2008. After addressing disagreements or inconsistencies in the pretest, the primary investigators adjusted the code sheet to reflect these changes. Holsti's coefficient reliability ranged from .88 to 1.00 on the individual variables. The following four units of analysis were coded either yes (1) or no (0): transparency, attribution, first person reference, and interactivity.

For the purposes of the study, blog was defined as a type of website produced by a news media outlet in which commentaries and/or opinions from both local journalists and audience members are displayed in a diary fashion. A key feature was feedback and interaction with audience members, which eliminated several outlets that hosted a forum or billboard allowing audience members to contribute opinions with no journalist input. A professional journalist associated with the local media outlet had to be making contributions to the blog on a semi-regular basis. The frequency of the journalists' contributions was deemed an important variable in regards to the newspapers commitment to blogging. Therefore, the frequency of posting was coded in the following categories: post within the week, post within the last 2 weeks, post within the month, and post more than a month ago.

Results

Sports journalists maintained the plurality of newspaper blogs (699, 49%) followed by entertainment reporters (291, 20%), general news reporters (272, 19%) and political reporters (177, 12%). More male reporters (1,111, 77%) than female reporters (329, 23%) contributed to a media blog. In total, 838 (58%) blogs from the 22 large size circulation papers, 492 (34%) from the 18 medium size papers, and 110 (8%) from the 7 small size circulation papers were analyzed. Additional demographic breakdown is found in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Breakdown of Frequency in Blog Posts

Category	Same Day	Within Week	2 Weeks	Month or More
Large Size	82 (10%)	418 (50%)	196 (23%)	142 (17%)
Medium Size	21 (5%)	254 (52%)	106 (21%)	111 (22%)
Small Size	1 (1%)	24 (22%)	34 (31%)	51 (46%)
<i>N</i> 1440				

Note. *Size of media outlet* was defined as small (under 25,000), medium (25,001-99,000 circulation), and large (circulation>100,000).

In regards to RQ1, slightly more than half (50.3%) of reporters' blogs contained personal opinions, $\chi^2(1, N=1440) = .044, p < .83$; and lacked attribution (52%), $\chi^2(1, N=1440) = 1.81, p < .18$. The majority (73%) of blog reporters also did not provide transparency or web links, $\chi^2(1, N=1440) = 288.01, p < .001$; and did not (87%) engage readers in the blog conversation, $\chi^2(1, N=1440) = 780.27, p < .001$. Overall, most reporter blogs (63%) did not include first person references, $\chi^2(1, N=1440) = 94.04, p < .001$ (Table 2).

Table 2: Overall χ^2 Analysis of Opinion Based Variables

Category	% that did include	% that did not include	χ^2
Personal Opinion	50.3	49.7	.04
Attribution	52	48	1.81
Transparency	27	73	288.01***
Engage in Conversation	13	87	780.27***
First Person Reference	37	63	94.04***

Note. Variables were coded 1 yes 0 no. For all analyses *N* = 1,440 and *df* = 1.

****p* < .001.

In RQ2, the researchers sought to determine if the level of opinion writing in blogs correlated to content category. Entertainment blogs contained a significant (77%) level of opinion writing, $\chi^2(1, N=291) = 82.56, p < .001$, while general news blogs (70%) were significantly non-opinionated, $\chi^2(1, N=272) = 42.88, p < .001$. The amount of opinion writing within sports and political blogs was also not significant at the .05 level. In all four categories reporters did not engage readers in conversation (Table 3).

Table 3: Blog Content: Use of Personal Writing and Engaging Readers to Converse Analysis of Opinion Based Variables

Category	Personal Opinions		Engage Readers to Converse			
	%No	%Yes	χ^2	%No	%Yes	χ^2
Sports (N = 699)	52	48	0.63	86	14	364.84***
General News (N = 272)	70	30	42.88***	86	14	138.36***
Political (N = 177)	55	45	1.63	93	7	128.21***
Entertainment (N = 291)	23	77	82.56***	86	14	150.10***

Note: For all analyses df = 1.

***p < .001.

A relationship did exist between the use of attribution in reporters' blog post and the subject matter of blogs. Reporter blog posts in general news, $\chi^2(1, N = 272) = 2.59, p < .001$ and politics, $\chi^2(1, N = 277) = 2.04, p < .001$ had a significant level of attribution, while entertainment blogs significantly did not, $\chi^2(1, N = 291) = 6.83, p < .001$. Sports blogs had more attribution than non-attribution, $\chi^2(1, N = 697) = 4.03, p < .045$.

Consistent with findings regarding attribution and opinion writing, general news reporters included links (70%) to other sources/transparency at a significant level, $\chi^2(1, N = 272) = 2.04, p < .001$, while entertainment reporters (77%), $\chi^2(1, N = 291) = 55.42, p < .001$; sports reporters, $\chi^2(1, N = 699) = 220.95, p < .001$; and political reporters, $\chi^2(1, N = 177) = 14.69, p < .001$ significantly did not. Regarding first person reference, reporters in sports, $\chi^2(1, N = 699) = 48.96, p < .001$; general news, $\chi^2(1, N = 272) = 91.77, p < .001$; and politics, $\chi^2(1, N = 177) = 17.09, p < .001$ typically did not refer to themselves in the first person. Entertainment reporters did use first person references, but at a level slightly under statistical significance, $\chi^2(1, N = 291) = 2.89, p < .09$ (Table 4).

Table 4: Blog Content: Use of Transparency and First Person

Category	Transparency		First Person			
	%No	%Yes	χ^2	%No	%Yes	χ^2
Sports (N = 699)	78	22	220.95***	63	37	48.96***
General News (N = 272)	37	63	19.05***	79	21	91.77***
Political (N = 177)	64	36	14.69***	66	34	17.09***
Entertainment (N = 291)	72	28	55.42***	45	55	0.90

Note: For all analyses df = 1.

***p < .001.

RQ3 sought to determine whether certain demographics influenced the amount of opinion writing in reporters' blogs. To answer this question, the researchers divided the data by circulation size and gender. Significant gender differences occurred in that female reporters were more likely than male reporters to include transparencies, $\chi^2(1, N = 1440) = 288.01, p < .001$, engage readers in conversation, $\chi^2(1, N = 1440) = 780.27, p < .001$, update information $\chi^2(1, N = 1440) = 265.87, p < .001$, but were less likely to include first person references $\chi^2(1, N = 1440) = 94.04, p < .001$. There were no significant gender differences regarding the use of attribution $\chi^2(1, N = 1440) = 1.81, p < .18$ or the inclusion of personal opinions/comments $\chi^2(1, N = 1440) = .044, p < .83$.

There were also important differences related to circulation size (Table 5). Newspapers with small circulations were less likely than larger circulation papers to use attribution, $\chi^2(2, N = 1437) = 2.61, p < .001$ and update information, $\chi^2(2, N = 1437) = 8.46, p < .01$, but more likely to write personal opinions/comments, $\chi^2(2, N = 1440) = 1.41, p < .001$, and to use first person references, $\chi^2(2, N = 1440) = 2.06, p < .001$. There were no differences in regards to transparency, $\chi^2(2, N = 1440) = 0.62, p < .529$, and posting breaking news $\chi^2(2, N = 1440) = 1.09, p < .58$.

**Table 5: Crosstabs:
Circulation Size with
Independent Variables**

	Sports			General News			Political Ent					
	Lrg	Med	Sm	Lrg	Med	Sm	Lrg	Med	Sm	Lrg	Med	Sm
Category: Personal Opinion												
Yes	206	101	32	51	16	15	42	22	16	134	82	7
No	205	137	18	120	59	11	45	45	7	35	30	3
Category: Update Information												
Yes	264	149	27	136	60	13	63	47	11	65	36	3
No	147	89	23	35	15	13	24	20	12	104	76	7
Category: Breaking News												
Yes	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No	407	23	50	171	75	26	87	67	23	169	111	10
Category: Transparency												
Yes	82	61	10	73	22	5	36	16	11	47	31	4
No	329	177	40	98	53	21	51	51	12	122	81	6

Category: First Person Reference

	Lrg	Med	Sm									
Yes	143	87	27	33	12	12	25	20	16	82	73	5
No	268	151	23	138	63	14	62	47	7	87	39	5

Category: Attribution

	Lrg	Med	Sm									
Yes	219	147	12	115	55	8	63	42	13	50	23	3
No	191	91	37	56	22	18	23	25	10	119	89	7

Category: Type of Source

	Lrg	Med	Sm									
Primary	122	53	6	71	39	2	44	34	10	29	9	0
2ndary	97	38	6	43	16	6	20	8	3	22	14	2

Note. Size of media outlet was defined as small (under 25,000), medium (25,001-99,000 circulation), and large (circulation>100,000).

Discussion

For the most part, newspaper journalists seem to be treating blogs much the same way they do their regular reporting. Consistent with previous studies,⁶⁰ reporters in this study seemed reluctant to abandon accepted journalistic practices such as objective reporting. These reporters also had high levels of transparency and attribution in their blogs, indicating a reliance on traditional news values. These findings seem to support Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit⁶¹ in that modern journalists still put a great deal of importance on factual reporting. More importantly, the current findings indicate that newspaper reporters simply viewed blogs as another platform to communicate traditional news stories and not as an alternative outlet for personal expression.

However, three subgroups within the study seemed more likely to create blogs that are personal, subjective and opinionated—entertainment reporters, male reporters and reporters with small newspapers. That entertainment reporters should venture more in to the areas of opinion is understandable; by nature, the subject lends itself to more subjectivity, especially when reporters give critiques or reviews of public performers or performances. During his time at the Memphis Commercial-Appeal, Arts writer Christopher Blank openly urged his colleagues to be “cheerleaders” and more “fanatical” in their work.⁶²

That sports and political reporters were not doing the same thing was somewhat surprising. Sports is much like entertainment reporting in that it is often not considered “real” reporting, and sports

journalism has often been called the “toy department” of the media outlet. Al Tompkins of the Poynter Institute says, “I come from 25 years in television (and) I personally treated sports more leniently than news. I let my sports guy do stuff I wouldn’t let the news anchors do.”⁶³

However, there has been a serious effort in recent years to raise the professionalism of sports journalism through more conventional and investigative work. In the 1980s sports reporters won Pulitzer Prizes for investigations into college athletics at the University of Arizona and the University of Kentucky. Another investigation into college athletics, this time at the University of Minnesota, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1999. In 2004, reporters Lance Williams and Mark Fainaru-Wada won both an Investigative Reporters and Editors award and the George Polk Award for their 2004 reporting in the San Francisco Chronicle on steroid use in Major League Baseball. In today’s media environment, sports reporting has become more serious and legitimate.⁶⁴

New technologies like blogging have also opened up demand for more serious sports reporting. The new media environment of multiple channels, content options and fragmented audiences has not only forced more competition between media companies, it has created more content outlets. In theory, competition should improve the quality of sports journalism, although it could be argued that it has only resulted in more sensationalism and pandering. However, there are more channels available for sports reporting, and several outlets have used the opportunity to expand their investigative reporting.

This same argument could be applied to reporting as a whole. Even in the midst of extensive reporter layoffs and cutbacks “almost all newsroom executives at larger papers said they considered it essential to maintain investigative reporting, a feature that sets them apart from blogs. Those efforts have benefited from the proliferation of databases, which allow newspapers to examine neighborhood crime statistics and restaurant closures.”⁶⁵ Editors said they had also seen gains in other online areas, including the ability to post stories quickly and to update them frequently.

It is also possible that the proliferation of citizen blogs is having an effect on reporter blogs. Professional reporters may be willing to cede to these citizen journalists the realm of rumor, opinion and innuendo, and offer audiences an alternative based on traditional reporting. This may also explain why political reporters have stayed with traditional journalism, especially given the growth of political punditry and opinion in blogs and on the Internet.

According to the findings, the notion of forced compliance within Festinger’s Cognitive Dissonance seems minimal at best. Instead of incorporating more opinion and commentary, journalists treated their blogs as another platform to distribute traditional news. Perhaps the economic downturn has influenced news managers in this regard and the issue of forced compliance was moot. It has also been found that managers have not clearly communicated to journalists their objectives related to the blogs.⁶⁶

In regards to outlet size, smaller newspapers seemed more likely to include personal and opinion blogs than larger papers, a result that may simply be the technological extension of community journalism. Reporters and editors in smaller towns feel a closer connection to their audiences, and often view their work as integral to the community as a whole. Arianne Cope,⁶⁷ former editor of the weekly Tremonton (UT) Leader, acknowledged in her blog:

The real treat of small town journalism ended up being the difference I could make within its distinctive sphere. I didn't merely have my fingers on the pulse of the community—I was often given the opportunity to be the heart that pumped it, creating events and seeing them through, opening a forum for serious community discourse.

Thus, reporters at smaller newspapers may be using their blogs in the same personal way they conduct their reporting. The differences between female reporters and male reporters in regards to blogging are not easily explained and may be related more to sociological and psychological factors rather than professional and journalistic ones.

Limitations and Future Research

The researchers acknowledge that it is difficult to get a complete picture of reporting blogs through the relatively small sample that was used in the study. Further study should include larger samples and longer time frames, although the researchers do believe that as a preliminary investigation the sample used was adequate for analysis. In addition, research should also investigate broadcast journalists blogs to gauge whether these reporters approach blogging in the same manner as print journalists.

It is possible that the specific time used for the study might have influenced the results, although the researchers took care to avoid any time period that might have had this effect (such as the weeks immediately before and after the national election).

Although these findings show that general reporters applied traditional journalistic values to their blog post, it is still unclear whether Lowrey and Anderson's⁶⁸ prediction that blogging will negatively impact reporter credibility is true. A suggested path of future research would include an analysis of blog audiences. Newspaper editors and reporters would benefit from getting quantitative audience feedback in regards to their blogs and how readers evaluate them.

Conclusion

It is an extremely difficult time for the news media, especially newspapers. The economic downturn of 2008-2009 was a disaster for such media titans as the New York Times, which fell \$1 billion in debt, and the Tribune Company, which filed for bankruptcy. Several other newspaper groups faced shutdown and liquidation, and those that survive may do so only through massive layoffs.⁶⁹ In such an environment the Internet becomes an attractive alternative because its low distribution costs. Many newspapers are expanding their online efforts, including the *Christian Science Monitor*, which in 2009 became the first national circulation newspaper to completely replace its print edition with an online version.⁷⁰ Often, staff reductions and layoffs reduce the quality of reporting. In the midst of the recent cutbacks, nearly two-thirds of the papers have cut back on international news; half of newspapers have reduced their coverage of the U.S., and more than one-third have slashed business news.⁷¹

However, it appears that even as newspapers reduce, they are trying to maintain quality using the Internet, their web pages, and specifically, blogging. So far, the demands of this new media environment have not forced journalists to accept lower standards of objectivity. Thus, the issue becomes one of economics and technology, not reporting behavior. Blogs are not necessarily being used to reinvent journalism practice, but rather as a cheaper means of distributing traditional material. Even as the New York Times announced the layoffs of 100 reporters in 2008, executive editor Bill Keller said the newspaper understands that “what we sell is journalism,” and he promised “fresh investments ... to expand our Web journalism ... (and) advancing a digital strategy.”⁷² In his *Economic Theory of News Selection*, McManus⁷³ posits that the financial well-being of the news corporation determined news content and delivery, as was the case with the current study.

It is unclear whether Tom Rosenstiel’s prediction that old media will be totally online is accurate, or if more newspapers will follow the example of the *Christian Science Monitor* and abandon print for the Internet. But even as the distribution of news goes through a technological revolution, the content of that distribution still seems strongly grounded in the past.

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