

BLOGGING: MEDIA FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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What would it be like to live in a world filled with media free of censorship, deadlines or corporate interference, where citizens could voice their opinions in an easily accessible medium to be read by millions across the globe? Welcome to blogging, media for the 21st century. In just a few short years, bloggers have changed the face of traditional media forever, forcing contemporary writers to update the way they think about journalism.

Blogs, or weblogs as they were originally known, started out as simple online journals, but the future “citizen journalists” quickly realized that this new medium could be much more than that. Articles started appearing about everything from recipe sharing to politics, and suddenly the World Wide Web became a forum for opinions on just about anything. Soon people were relying on blogs not only as a secondary source for news, but as their primary source. Yet it is their use as secondary sources to traditional media that is causing such drastic reform. Bloggers, with their built-in audience of millions around the globe, hold media accountable to what they say better than anyone has before. Nationwide news stories have been sparked by blogs. Within hours of Dan Rather’s newscast, the authenticity of the Killian documents was challenged by a blogger whose post sparked the investigation that finally revealed the truth. Blogs also give a new perspective on traditional news stories, and help to reveal the truth behind stories that would otherwise be heavily colored by the network’s bias or by corporate interference. While the war in Iraq may sound like a wonderful idea in the purely conservative newspaper, a blog written by a nineteen-year-old soldier fighting on the front lines gives a different account. Auto-translating programs built into blogs allow internet users to view the blogs of the Iraqi soldiers, and even Iraqi citizens in the midst of war, providing perspective that could never be found in traditional news mediums. As citizens become more informed, journalists are forced to reevaluate their own writing techniques and remove the bias that is so prevalent in their writing to avoid being discredited by the public. In some cases, blogs are the most accurate source of news. During the Hurricane Katrina period in New Orleans, the most-read news story came from a blogger who experienced the hurricane first hand. During times of crisis, detailed, emotion-filled blogs can give a much more truthful account of the situation than that of a factual, unaffected news-anchor.

Blogs also ease the hardships traditionally associated with the common public having its’ opinions heard. As nothing but an internet connection is needed to create one, anyone can become a blogger and have their opinions read by millions across the globe instantly. Not only that, but the media is two-way. Comments pages are available on almost every online blog, which allows anyone who reads it to openly oppose the views of the writer without fear of retribution. Such easy access to many different viewpoints allows the common reader to decipher what they feel is the truth in a much more conveniently than, say, reading every newspaper article on the subject and sifting through the bias of those writers. Blogs hold prominent biases of their own, but with other

people's responses available on the very same page, it is much easier to determine the facts from the fiction in a blog than in a traditional news story. Reading opinions from many different bloggers, all coming from very different walks of life, allows the reader to make an informed decision about what they feel is true and what they feel isn't.

Blogging has its downside as well. Unlike traditional news, blogs have no regulations on content. The blog's best feature is also its worst: anyone with an internet connection can write anything they want and have it read by millions. There are no editors; many blogs end up politically and culturally incorrect, with the writers themselves only knowing half the story. There are no fact-checkers; a large majority of blogs contain "facts" with no citation or verification of any kind. For all the reader knows, these facts could be wrong or even made up completely to support the blogger's claims. Errors of this nature can have a profound affect on the reader, if they choose to use blogs as their primary source of news, as the reader may fundamentally change their views on an issue based on false facts or political and cultural biases. However, the incorrectness that comes with most blogs is part of the territory. Blog readers acknowledge that fact and are generally known to use many sources, including traditional media, blogs, and other resources, to make an informed decision as to where they stand on those issues.

Blogs are, without a doubt, the media of the future. By allowing citizens an easily accessible forum for expressing their opinions and debating other's opinions, blogs give the average citizen choice about what and who they should believe. The lack of censorship, corporate or political interference or one-sided opinions make blogs easily the best news form to date, yet they allow for the continued use of traditional media, even improving it by holding journalists and reporters accountable and voicing concerns when they aren't. The only question left to ask is: When are you going to start your blog?
