Can Blogs Be Trusted?
Law and Political Science Section 2007 Program
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Annotated Bibliography of Resources
&
Select Bibliographies for Program Speakers
Compiled by the Law & Political Science Section, Library Instruction Committee*

Blogs as Sources of Information


Carlson argues that to clearly understand the role that blogs play in political discourse, one must examine the media context in which they appear. Blogs have created tensions in the journalistic community, which is seeking to preserve its authority in the face of new and contemporary modes of expression and competitiveness. Carlson cites journalistic critiques of blog Election Day 2004 coverage as an example of the attempt by journalists to maintain their role as “authoritative providers of political news.”


The Minnesota Blog Collective is in and of itself a blog focused on issues of internet discourse and the blogosphere. Gallo’s contribution reflects upon the integration of blogs “into the ever-evolving palate of complementary media available to journalists and to the public.” He also considers at length the train of thought that blogging is a means to “democratize” the media industry.


Haas provides a well researched overview of scholarly and popular discourse on blogs. The article centers upon a more theoretical approach to blogs, communication, and media discourse. Haas concludes that blogs possess, at least to a certain extent, some similarities with mainstream media outlets (e.g., the mirroring of mainstream media’s hierarchical structure in the small number of influential bloggers or collaborative weblogs who act as gate-keepers or agenda-setters in the blogosphere) and that it is premature to argue that blogs are a radical departure to the more established media of communication.

Johnson and Kaye provide an interesting analysis of the perceptions of blog users towards blogs, particularly in relation to more traditional journalistic discourse. The authors find that an overwhelming majority of respondents believe blogs to be moderately to very credible. In fact, respondents tended to judge blogs higher than mainstream media in terms of credibility. Blogs are perceived as more “analytical, independent and personal.” However, the level of fairness in blogs was perceived as being generally low.


Kline and Burstein provide an analytical overview and history of the blog “revolution.” They also reprint key articles on the blog phenomenon and interview over two dozen bloggers and media analysts. The authors focus particularly on the ease and freedom of blog publishing, simplicity of searching within and across blogs. The authors also emphasize how blogs are affecting and challenging mainstream media, which, according to some scholars has begun to suffer from widespread dissatisfaction from the public.


Lawson-Borders and Kirk offer a rather comprehensive analysis of the blog phenomenon and its effects on campaign discourse and political communication. They explore the use of blogs as (1) a social diary/narrative, (2) as organizing tools for political groups and communication, and (3) as a form of civil, participatory journalism. Although an important and growing phenomenon, the authors assert that blogs did not have a distinctive effect on the 2004 presidential campaign.


Palser notes that many bloggers critique traditional journalists for negligence, laziness, and lack of credibility. She goes on to explore the growth and development of the blogging movement and spends some time investigating the composition of the “blogosphere.” According to her analysis, bloggers have influenced traditional, mainstream mass communication and media in three distinct ways: (1) by policing the media, (2) by acting as “conduits” between mainstream media and the online “zeitgeist”, and (3) by achieving credibility as “media pundits.”

Singer provides a qualitative (content) analysis of twenty weblogs to examine how blogs are affecting journalistic norms and practices. In particular, she addresses issues of non-partisanship, transparency, gatekeeping, and authority among blogs. She argues that “journalists are ‘normalizing’ the blog as a component [of traditional media], and in some ways an enhancement, of traditional journalistic norms and practices.”


Wall focuses and reflects upon blogs that appeared during the 2003 Iraq invasion. She argues that “blogs are a new genre of journalism that emphasizes personalization, audience participation in content creation and story forms that are fragmented and interdependent with other websites.”

**Librarians and Blogs**


Describes project undertaken by two librarians at Michigan State University to begin using a blog as a communication tool for library reference services. Gives step-by-step description of the implementation of the blog and provides tips to help other libraries create their own blogs.


This article discusses blogs for academic libraries and how they can be used to communicate library news as well as more entertaining information. The author explores how library bloggers experience challenges in creating content that users will find interesting.


This article examines how the Carnival of Infosciences blog works. This blog is unique in that content is aggregated from different library blogs all over the web. A volunteer guest blogger chooses a best blog entry every week and posts it to the Carnival.


This article advocates for using library blogs to promote collections and services instead of only using them to communicate mundane library news like computer problems or special hours.

This article provides a detailed explanation of what blogs are. Also discusses current literature on blogs as well as using blogs as a tool for professional development.


The article presents an interview with several librarian bloggers in the U.S., such as Jessamyn West, Nicole Engard, and Joshua M. Neff, about their interest in blogging.


This article summarizes a study of library blogs for their usefulness and value to the field of librarianship.


This article discusses the increasing importance of blog content for research and the fact that this information may disappear in the future. The author states that blogs should be archived just as newspapers and magazines are now.


This article examines the use of blogs for collaborative reference services. Specifically, the open-source software Lyceum is used to facilitate this team approach to reference services.


This article explores how to market a library blog, claiming that even the most compelling content will not attract users if they do not know the blog exists.


This article offers a case study showing the implementation of a blog for communicating subject-specific news to students at Georgia State University Library.


The author examines the possibility of using blogs to archive digital content, making it available to “more people in more places”. Also includes a basic discussion blogs with librarian and archivist opinions on preserving content with blogs.
Jason Zengerle
Senior Editor at The New Republic

Blog

The Plank - http://www.tnr.com/blog/theplank
Zengerle is one of the primary contributors to The Plank, a political blog hosted on The New Republic’s website.

Articles

A selection of recent Zengerle articles from The New Republic:


Recent articles from other publications:


**Articles/blog posts on Daily Kos/The New Republic blog dispute:**


Posts by Jason Zengerle discussing an e-mail about blogger and political consultant Jerome Armstrong circulated by Daily Kos founder Markos Moulitsas to “Townhouse,” a private e-mail list for liberal activists and journalists. Zengerle speculates on why the Daily Kos and other liberal blogs failed to comment on stories regarding Armstrong’s 2000 investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission and comments on the economic power Kos wields in the blog world.


Moulitsas refutes Zengerle’s accusations and claims The New Republic attacks blogs such as the Daily Kos because they have negatively impacted the publication both editorially (by ridiculing TNR’s support for Joe Lieberman, for example) and financially (by siphoning away readers). Moulitsas interprets TNR’s criticisms of the Daily Kos and, more generally, politically progressive blogs, as an indication that the publication has moved to the political right.


Published in Salon.com’s “War Room” blog, this post takes a somewhat lighthearted view of what author Michael Scherer characterizes as the “blog fight” between Zengerle and Moulitsas. Scherer downplays the importance and supposed secrecy of the Townhouse e-mail list, but points out that liberal bloggers and pundits who characterize themselves as populist outsiders may lose credibility if associated with what was essentially an elite, private club.

Recounts some of the acrimonious history between The New Republic and Daily Kos and describes the tension between traditional media and “new media” outlets, like blogs. Grynbaum describes political blogs as occupying an ambiguous middle ground between advocacy and journalism. While the influence of the “blogosphere” is steadily growing, this opens up the medium to increased scrutiny and criticism.

Eric Alterman

columnist for The Nation and creator of the Altercation blog found at http://mediamatters.org/altercation

Select Bibliography


Alterman describes the rise of punditocracy and the resulting diminishment of public discourse. He traces the punditocracy from Walter Lippman to the McLaughlin Group. He also has individual chapters on George Will, The New Republic, and The Washington Post. Alterman decries the decline in quality of political analysis and the rightward ideological drift.


A sharp critique of the foreign policy process. Alterman argues that most Americans have no voice in foreign policy decision-making. Instead, elites dominate and leave little room for challenges to their perspectives. With the end of the Cold War, Alterman argues that a shift to a more democratic foreign policy is necessary. He ends his book with a series of reform proposals designed to make foreign policy decision-making more responsible.


An admiring biography of Bruce Springsteen that puts him squarely within the political and cultural context of his times. Alterman also describes the personal impact Springsteen has had on his life.


Alterman challenges the notion that there is liberal media bias and instead argues that the media is more conservative. Right wing media critics Bernard Goldberg, Bill O’Reilly, Anne
Coulter, Rush Limbaugh, and George Will all come under close scrutiny. Alterman argues that conservative complaints have intimidated the media so much that they tend to overcompensate and not critically examine the right. Conservatives also tend to be more skillful in getting their message across.

New York: Penguin.

Sharp, comprehensive critique of Bush’s first term in office. Alterman and Green dissect Bush’s governing strategy and focus special attention on his media manipulation techniques. They make the case that Bush promotes a radical right wing agenda that is at odds with the moderate nature of the country. Bush’s image as a “compassionate conservative” is undermined by the reality of his radical conservative positions.

New York: Penguin.

Alterman explores the consequences of four presidential lies: (1) FDR misrepresenting the Yalta accords, thus causing 50 years of anti-Soviet paranoia, (2) JFK’s secret deal with the Soviets to remove American missiles in Turkey in exchange for the Soviet missiles in Cuba, (3) the Vietnamese “attack” in the Gulf of Tonkin, and (4) Reagan’s lies during the Iran-Contra scandal. Alterman emphasizes the disastrous unintended consequences of these actions. Instead of deceptions, Alterman calls for more honesty from our foreign policy decision-makers.

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