

Blog

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Abstract

Weblogs, or blogs, are a particular form and format for publishing a series of what are usually relatively brief articles to a Website, where they are listed in reverse chronological order. Originally used mostly for publishing personal diaries, blogs were widely adopted across a range of personal and professional purposes, and arguably inspired the format of subsequent social media platforms; today, blog-style content is ubiquitous on the Web, without the term 'blog' necessarily being applied in all cases.

Main Text

Weblogs, or blogs, are a particular form and format for publishing textual and audiovisual content on Websites. Blog content can vary widely in topic and authoring style, but common to all blogs is that individual blog articles are presented by default in reverse chronological order (with the latest updates at the top). They are often featured on the main page of the blog in excerpt form, allowing prospective readers to click through to the full article on a separate page. Many blogs also allow their readers to attach their comments to the blog article itself, thus potentially allowing for a dialogue between blog author and readers, though the availability of such functionality is usually controlled by the blog author and operator.

The term 'blog' thus describes the entire collection of articles (as Website in its own right, or a distinct subsection of a larger Website), while individual articles on a blog are called 'blog posts', and the act of writing and publishing a post, and of maintaining a blog on a continuous basis is known as 'blogging'. (However, in nonstandard use of such terminology 'blog' is sometimes also used to refer to a single blog post, as in "I have just written a new blog".) Further, blog authors are commonly described as 'bloggers', and the entirety of all blogs on the Web is known as the 'blogosphere' (with subsets designated for example as 'the Italian blogosphere' or 'the tech blogosphere').

'Blog' itself is a shortening of the term 'Weblog' – a format for self-publishing frequent updates on topics of interest to the blogger which emerged in the late 1990s and gradually gained popularity over subsequent years. Weblogs themselves share a common history with earlier computer-mediated communication technologies such as Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs) and early Web-based Content Management Systems (CMSs), and translated some of their underlying principles into the standard blog formats which gradually emerged. Blogs distinguished themselves from such forms by initially focusing chiefly on providing the frameworks for creating sole-authored, stand-alone Websites, thus enabling a broad range of Web users to become content creators and publishers in their own right.

Such developments were supported especially by the emergence of a number of key centralized platforms for blogging, including *Blogger* (later acquired by Google) and *LiveJournal* (now owned by SUP Media, Russia), both of which were launched in 1999. These platforms popularized blogging considerably by removing most barriers to entry for prospective bloggers without the technical skills to set up and operate their own Webservers. Further, in addition to standard search engines, a number of dedicated blog indices and search engines such as *Technorati* and *Blogdex* as well as *Google Blog Search* began to offer thematic directories of blogs and popularity analytics (most of these have since been discontinued, in favour of standard search engines).

Very early blogs often addressed technology and related themes, in keeping with the demographics of the ‘geek’ subculture from which they emerged; following the popularization of the genre through the availability of blogging platforms such as *Blogger*, however, the vast majority of blogs were personal diaries reporting on various aspects of the private lives of their authors. Over time, a range of specific blogging genres emerged from the rapid growth in blogging at the start of the new millennium: amongst the most prominent and most influential blog types are political and citizen journalism blogs, photography and video blogs, cooking blogs, parenting blogs, and professional blogs, but many other variations also exist (Gurak et al. 2004; Bruns & Jacobs 2006; Walker Rettberg 2008).

Research into blogging has focused especially – and disproportionately much – on journalistic and political uses of blogs. It has highlighted the adoption of blogging by a number of professional journalists as an indication of the impact of participative, “Web 2.0” technologies on the news industry, requiring a more interactive engagement with readers and viewers; early journalist-blogger Dan Gillmor famously observed “my readers know more than I do” (2003, vi), and described how he used his blog to source additional input and feedback for his news stories. Additionally, such research has also pointed out the role of independent bloggers as news commentators and citizen journalists; in their commentary on current affairs, potentially informed by their own professional expertise, such bloggers are seen as committing “random acts of journalism” (Lasica 2003, 73). Such independent blog-based commentary is credited with a direct impact on mainstream political processes in a number of major events, including the resignations of several high-profile political figures in the United States.

Enthusiasm for and popular media coverage of blogging as a distinct publishing format in its own right has declined considerably since its heyday in the early 2000s, especially following the emergence of more recent social media platforms such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Arguably, however, these platforms have inherited many of the key traits of blogs: they continue to present user posts in reverse chronological order and offer extensive commenting functionality for readers. They advance beyond blogging frameworks, however, by providing a unified platform for such activities, rather than operating as a decentralized network of individual Websites; this enables them to support more effective content search and user networking functionality, and to offer more advanced content analytics. Notably, *Twitter* is often described as a “microblogging” service (highlighting the 140-character limit which applies to posts), and the name of the leading Chinese-language social media platform *Weibo* literally translates as micro (*wei*) blog (*bo*).

Additionally, blogging remains a core functionality in many contemporary content management systems, and a large number of Websites continue to feature blogs, even if these sections are not necessarily advertised as such – they are instead described as featuring newsfeeds, updates, or other actuality content. Arguably, this indicates that the forms and formats of blogging have become normalized in online publishing to a point where ‘blog’ itself is no longer a major term of distinction.

SEE ALSO:

Digital Cultures

Digital Media (include New media culture; Social media)

Information (include Information society; Internet)

Online communities (virtual communities)

Social networking sites

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Further Readings

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