

blogging Weblogs, or blogs, constitute a form and genre of online publishing that emerged in the mid-1990s as a logical consequence of the confluence of personal and professional home pages and new web publishing technologies. To overcome technological limitations, where **news** updates had to be manually inserted by editing the underlying HTML code, the early content-management systems in the second half of the 1990s built on server-side database technology to dynamically generate web pages; this enabled more convenient and more frequent content updates. Weblogs utilised such technologies to provide an up-to-date news feed, presenting individual news items in reverse chronological order. Most blogging platforms provide commenting functions that enable readers to respond to and discuss individual blog posts.

Early blogs were operated by online technologists, but the practice was popularised with the advent of dedicated blog-hosting services such as LiveJournal and Blogger in 1999. These sites, now seen as precursors of Web 2.0, provided web-based interfaces for creating and operating blogs that required minimal technical knowledge, making the reading and writing of blogs accessible to a mass audience. Blogging approaches, practices and styles rapidly diversified as a result; they now range from diary-style personal blogs through a wide spectrum of special interests at the personal and professional level to those covering news and politics.

By the mid-2000s, several scholarly collections – including Laura Gurak et al.'s *Into the Blogosphere* (2004) and Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs' *Uses of Blogs* (2006) – attempted to map these diverse genres of blogging, and to assess the role of blogs as components within the wider mediasphere. Likewise, dedicated blog indices and search engines such as Technorati began to index blog contents and provide up-to-date statistics on the activity and comparative ranking of individual blogs.

A disproportionate amount of attention has been paid to political blogs and their impact on national politics. US blogs have been implicated in a number of political scandals, and bloggers were officially accredited in the 2004 presidential elections. Politicians and journalists also increasingly created their own blogs in order to connect with constituents and readers.

In Australia, too, much of the public discussion about blogging has been directed towards political blogs. Here, one of the earliest Australian political blogs was *Webdiary*, published by **Sydney Morning Herald** journalist Margo Kingston from 2000 to 2012. On her departure from **Fairfax Media** in 2005, Kingston helped re-establish *Webdiary* as a participatory journalism and news discussion community, supported by volunteer labour and occasional donations. Until 2012, when the site closed, a small contributor group took care of editorial, moderation and technical work. Founded before self-publishing became ubiquitous, *Webdiary* encouraged many users to publish for the first time, launching the media careers of writer/commentators Antony Loewenstein and Tim Dunlop.

Prominent columnists such as Tim Blair and Andrew Bolt have operated successful blogs, while several prominent independent political blogs also emerged during the early 2000s. Despite the early involvement of journalists in Australian political blogging, the relationship between bloggers and journalists has at times been fraught; this was especially true during the 'blog wars' around the 2007 federal election, when bloggers forcefully criticised what they saw as the partisan and counterfactual interpretation of opinion polls by mainstream media commentators, especially at the **Australian**. In turn, mainstream columnists called political bloggers 'parasites' and 'armchair journalists'.

Such animosity masks a considerable overlap between Australian political bloggers and the mainstream commentariat, however. Several previously independent bloggers have been employed (at least temporarily) as columnists on newspaper websites, such as Peter Brent and Tim Dunlop at the **Australian**, while others have become regular commentators on blog-style mainstream media commentary sites such as *The Drum* (**ABC**), *The Punch* (**News Limited**) and the **National Times** (Fairfax Media). Likewise, blog formats at least partly inspire online-only news and commentary publications such as *On Line Opinion*, **Crikey**, *New Matilda* and *The Conversation*. Indeed, the online versions of many regular newspaper columns are now frequently described as 'blogs' on the newspaper websites.

Claims about the 'death of blogging' in the early 2010s are exaggerated. What has really taken place is a normalisation of blogging formats and practices, to a point where the ubiquity of blog-style functionality has made a discussion of blogs *as* blogs increasingly difficult. The reverse-chronological news updates logic of blogging has been embedded as a core feature into social

networking sites such as Facebook, real-time microblogs such as Twitter and multimedia sharing platforms such as Tumblr – a personal profile on Facebook, for example, essentially *is* a blog, even if the term is rarely used. What such more recent platforms do is to extend blogging practices by embedding them into a wider socio-technological framework, enhanced by recent web technologies.

REF: J. Walker Rettberg, *Blogging* (2008).

AXEL BRUNS