

2005 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

Day 2, Panel 2: Discussing the News - Researching Blogs and Online Forum

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MARK TREMAYNE: From the topic of the last session, I would suspect we're talking about bloggers and, really, the title of the session is "Discussing the News," so we're looking at not just the bloggers but also users of online forums, and I would suspect there are a fair number of bloggers out there that aren't particularly concerned if mainstream media survives or not, so [laughs]. So, picking up just from the last topic of the last panel

So, what we'll do is each person will present in the order on the program, and then at the conclusion of that we'll have questions. I'll have a few comments then as well. So. To get us started, what we'll start with Rick Stevens, an assistant professor at Southern Methodist University, who will present "Bloggagate: How the CBS National Guard Story Affected Coverage of Webloggers." A subject of interest to me, because I'm working on a paper related to that. So.

J. RICHARD STEVENS: OK. As Mark said, we're talking about Bloggagate. We're looking, at least in a very limited way, how the CBS National Guard story affected the coverage of webloggers. A lot of times, we talk about the relationship between webloggers and the MSM, mainstream media, and we talk about it in one direction. I'm kind of looking at it the other way around.

We're going to start with a quote from Walter Lippmann. Last year, I presented at this conference, and we kind of had a discussion about this, where in 1920, he said he wrote, "The news of the day, as it reaches the newspaper office, is an incredibly medley of fact, propaganda, rumor, suspicion, clues, hopes and fears, and the task

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of selecting and ordering that news is one of the truly sacred and priestly offices in democracy." And we kind of started talking about weblogs in that context; that is, if we've kind of drawn up a metaphor in the discussion, where we're saying if the MSM was the orthodox movement of information, that maybe bloggers - maybe we're starting to see the beginning of a Reformation, and maybe Matt Drudge was Martin Luther, or something like that. [laughter].

But. Ah, but that question keeps coming up. Are webloggers amateur participants in the priestly duties of journalism? Do they empower the critical debates that form our democracy, or do they drown them out in the noise of the spectacle, when we're talking about these blog swarms that happen? And, of course, never were some of these questions more salient than during the controversy surrounding the CBS Bush National Guard story.

So, what I've - what the purpose of this study is, is to kind of look at it from the direction of "How does the mainstream media respond, at least in the short term, to these blog swarms?" when they happen, when you have these slow - I'm sorry - these very fast, tightly compact periods of intense activity about a particular topic. So, towards that purpose, we're trying to analyze just the short term, specifically of the New York Times. I have looked at other media, but this particular endeavor was looking at how the New York Times responded to it. So I looked at six different questions, and I'm going to skip over a lot of stuff that's in the paper, and just get to the questions, and then to what we're talking about.

First question: what effect did the CBS Guard story controversy have over the frequency of stories in the Times mentioning weblogging and bloggers? And I'll break down the search terms that I was looking at. Did the CBS controversy lead the Times to increase the number of stories about specific blogs or bloggers? When we're talking about profiling particular writers and their publications. And were Times stories more or less likely to define blogs or blogging terminology in stories after the controversy than before? In other words, when all of a sudden people have claimed that there's this greater attention to blogging, did more or the stories, whenever a blog reference came up, was the Times and other outlets, did they slow down and say, "Now, let's tell you what a blog is, and here's what it is and where it comes from," etc. Fourth question: did the CBS controversy lead the Times to increase their use of blogs as sources in their stories? If there is this relationship going on, how likely are mainstream media outlets to use blogs in their newsgathering to report what other people are thinking? Fifth question: did the CBS controversy cause the Times to publish more blog addresses in their story? That's something that I've started, kind of, looking at. We talk a lot about blogs, but how often do we give the addresses to that information? That was a question I was interested in. And did the CBS controversy cause the Times to frame web logs in conflict with traditional journalism? Kind of looking at some frames to see if this is a conflicting relationship. OK.

So the method that I was employing to do this, I was looking at a six-month period, kind of the - ah, from June 6th to December 1st, which brings that middle point

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when the CBS story first broke, and then you start to see those reactions. The terms that I was searching for - and this, kind of, I found really difficult at first, because there still is no standard nomenclature around which terms different outlets use. For the New York Times, it seemed to work pretty well to capture "blog," "weblog," "web log," and "blogger," and that seemed to catch all of them. However, in other outlets, there were other terms: "weblogging," "webloggers," you know. There's a lot of terms out there, so if you're doing - especially using Lexus Nexis or some other data search engine - you have to be very careful about searching just for "blog" and missing a lot of the stories that don't show up on that.

In that, there were 128 stories that contained the word "blog," 59 stories containing the term "blogger," 57 stories containing the term "web log" - two separate words - and then 18 stories containing the term combined, "weblog." So, if you add all that up, the total number of stories initially collected was 263. However - that's when you start, kind of, sifting through - because obviously, some of these terms are going to overlap, because especially when you have "web log or blog," then you've got two stories showing up in the category, so you have to remove the duplicates. But also, I went through and pulled out all the non-editorial pieces from the collection. These were things like letters to the editor, staff lists, story budget lists - which often show up in Lexus Nexis and other places - the list of contributors, often, because you'll have a contributing writer is at, you know, so-and-so I didn't think that really was relevant. And all of those items were removed, which gave us - which gave me the final 168 stories that we were looking at over that spectrum.

Then we did a content analysis, counting attributes; in other words, on some of these, we're counting numbers of citations, stories, the unit of analysis, but we're looking at particular things and counting, but also had to do some framing, especially when you start talking about that adversarial role, how was that presented. There were three coders and the inner code of reliability across when you pull that all together, was fairly high. Meaning that our definitions were pretty good. We all agreed about what we were coding.

Well, so let's look at some of the effects. Of course, a lot of these questions came up as I've been reading blogs, and you kind of hear, as the CBS scandal went on, of course, a lot of frames came out about the bloggers against Dan Rather, and had this big [inaudible], and of course when a lot of the events unfolded with the CBS report, there were some in the blogging community who were pretty quick to boast about their achievements, and so - that was kind of what got me thinking about this, were some of the statistics they were citing, and some of the - ah, when they were claiming triumph in this epic battle of, you know, new media and old media. Well, looking at the aggregate, first - looking at the three months prior and three months after, you kind of see where they're getting some of these ideas. However, we're going to talk about why that's not necessarily for the reasons they think it is.

Fifty-four percent - there was a 54% increase in the number of stories mentioning blog terminology in the three months after than before. There was a 45% increase in stories profiling particular blogs. There was a 45% increase in the citation of blogs as

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a source in a story. There was a 35% increase in the number of stories containing URLs, and there was a 50% increase in the number of stories containing this "conflict frame" that we were looking at. So what does that look like visually? Because I know that's not very helpful, and let's put the real numbers on it This is what it looked like. You've got the pre-CBS story and the post-CBS story, and you kind of see them coming together.

Two things I want to point out on this, before we move into some of the more interesting parts of it; the definition, in neither category, was very high. Of course, you can see two references to the definition, and one afterwards. Meaning only that the New York Times, which has been covering blogs and talking about it for a long time, believes that their readers do not need their explanation, either before or after. It did not affect at all; they just don't define it. Which is interesting, because some outlets take every opportunity to explain it. But not them. The other one is, you look on the end, the CBS stories, and I started keeping track of which of these stories, especially in the conflict frames, were specifically about the CBS story, which will come into play in just a minute. So when you look, even, at the table, at first you can say, "I understand why blogs feel like they've won a victory, because of all this increased exposure in coverage of blogs, who'd now have this voice - have a voice in the continuum because of this event."

However, when you break it down to the week-by-week, it doesn't seem to support, necessarily, a significant increase because of the CBS story. Because if you look where the big spike happens, it's not immediately after that event. It's much later. It falls in this week of 10/28 to 11/3, and - gee - I don't know, but it seems like there was another news story going on on the 2nd of November, which the blogging community had a lot of profiles invested in. So, this is just the number of stories that contained the terminology at all. And, of course, notice that big spike of 18. And again, when you look at stories that are profiling bloggers or blogs, again, the big spike happens that very week. There were a lot more profiles run. You can see, if you go back and look at the dates when the different were, you can see little spikes there, as well. But right after the CBS story, that's when you would expect, if there was going to be a huge, immediate impact, that you would see right after that point, "Here are the people talking about this." And it doesn't seem to have a huge effect. You see just moderate increases.

You see the same thing, pretty much, from stories that cite blogs for source material. I mean, you do see some high-levels, but you saw some right before. As you can see, again, the big increase happens right after the election. And the other part of that is not just the election and what bloggers thought about it, but remember that a lot of the outlets were talking about "why did we miss the exit polls so bad?" Well, it was because certain blogs had published information from exit polls sooner than we normally do, and that just led to a lot more discussion about how that information got out, who did it, and who these people are.

Also, there was an increase on the addresses, but I also wanted to overlay that with the blog citations, because - as you can see - most of the citations, most of the

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addresses that come out, come out when they're profiling a blog, which is very natural. Here's a blogger we're gonna talk about, this experience that they're having, for example their credential to cover something, so we're gonna describe what this is like for the amateurs to do it well, of course those are going to be the occasions where you're gonna put an address, too. That is something that - and one thing I should point out, I think a lot of times the reason why we don't put more URLs of the blogs is because when you put a - when you cite a blog, and you give it's name, often you know your users are probably just going to go Google it, or they're going to type it straight in and do a search for the particular person you're talking about. But I find it interesting that it's - we often do cite what issue of Newsweek we report something from, but we don't often cite the post or give the URL, probably [inaudible].

When you get to conflict frames, however, at first you see this - as you can probably imagine - this incredible spike immediately after September 8th. You also see another one, again, right around the election, but - that's why I pulled in this extra, counting the CBS stories - most of those conflict frames simply came from the stories when they were talking about what's going on with CBS. The New York Times reports on CBS, and they happen to report on bloggers, that's when these conflict frames come up. So it's not really that surprising. OK? So when you walk through most of the questions that I asked early on, what big effect did this have on the way the New York Times covers weblogs, the answer is "Not really that much." Because they were already reporting before, and the reporting afterwards - the election and, of course, the missed exit poll results stories, had much more of an effect on how these were cited.

So, some thoughts and conclusions. I wanted to kind of keep this short, and we can talk about it in the questions. Of course, I was looking at some very, very short-term effects, because these were some of the things being put out in the blogosphere, talking about this immediate effect. This immediate effect doesn't seem to happen, because this relationship is developing much more gradually. First of all, the relationship between the New York Times and the blogging community was already relatively established. There are, when you go back over the last few years, there are thousand of stories that include blogging and blogging relationships. I should point out that this was based on the print version of the New York Times and not the New York Times on the web, which of course would have had a very different, because they - you know, having blogs on the site kind of changes that dynamic a little bit. Which also means that blogs are not as powerful as they'd like to claim, which - you know - we probably could have guessed. I mean, no one is as powerful as they'd like to claim, when they're boasting about a "victory" in the marketplace.

But also, laying kind of the groundwork of this methodology allowed me to go and look at other media and kind of benchmark, and then go back to other, previous moments, like the Trent Lott scandal, going back to - even the Clinton/Lewinsky moment, and say "What are the effects, in the short term?"

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And again, I wanted to point out that, when you do look at other media, if you happen to be doing that, the four terms that I used - "weblog," "web log," "blog" and "blogger" - work pretty well, but there are other terms - "weblogging," "weblogger," "blogging," et cetera - that some outlets tend to prefer, and you just have to be very careful and tailor your searches to make sure that you're not missing something based on nonstandard terminology.

One other thing I would throw in, that wasn't in this study but it was in one I was doing in other places - I was looking at papers and broadcast media, also, just to kind of look at the raw numbers, and originally, what I wanted to do here, was say, "Here's what happened with the New York Times, and here's what happened when CBS addressed bloggers." I thought that would've been a very interesting question, and the answer, really, is "They didn't talk about blogging before, and they didn't talk about blogging after, and they don't really talk about blogging now," which is kind of interesting. We could talk about why, if somebody wants to get into that. But, so the short-term effects just aren't supported, aren't there. And we'll have to see, gradually, over time, if there's a long-term impact on the relationship.

[Applause.]

MARK TREMAYNE: Thank you, Rick. Our next speaker is Young-Gil Chae, a doctoral student here at UT in the Department of Radio, Television and Film, and he is going to talk about discussion forums on online news sites.

YOUNG-GIL CHAE: Hi, my name is Young-Gil Chae, and I'm a doctoral student in radio, TV, and film here at UT Austin. I'm not a journalism student, so [laughs.]

Today I want to talk about the culture of US public sphere, through the analysis of online bulletin boards in US local online newspapers. So, this is about BBS. Which is, kind of, a very old technology, comparing to blogs and things like that. I know that there has to be someone saying that, "Why BBS? There are a bunch of new technologies and multimedias that are out there, and" Actually, it is true. Who cares about BBS in local news media? [laughs.] Ah, but at least, I do, because I think that the fact that the people here, U.S., [inaudible] particular attention to the BBS, has its own story. I think it can tell us, kind of, the cultural values embedded in the [demise] of the BBS.

So, let me start with the brief theoretical backgrounds, and the existing researches on the public forum. Researchers are defining the public forum as the place for the people to come together and talk about, on social issues. And sometimes they plan collectively. So, we can define online public forums as such. It is the virtual place, or "cyberspace," in which persons come together to discuss issues and form opinions or plan actions. But I don't think this is enough explanation about the public forums. Because I believe that the online public forum, and the technology the nature and the nature of a technology is not determined, not by just how technological a preference is, but by social relations. So I think we need to expand our focus to the

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extent to include those other factors, such as psychological aspects and social aspects, too.

At first, let me talk about, briefly, technology aspects. I believe everybody knows about interactivity. It is, kind of, the fundamental technological opportunity for the users to have their opinions on the Internet. And it is the very reason why there are successful online news and Wikipedia, and things like that. And there is, also, another aspect of technological dimensions, which is deliberation.

Deliberation, actually, provides opportunity for the users to have a critical, rational reflection on the issues or the messages on the board. But many people don't believe that the people on the boards has, kind of, the ability to have critical, rational reflection. Some people - I heard that some people say, "The users of these bulletin boards are junk. They are hanging around on the board, and they just throw away their thoughts, and they just fight with each other, sometimes, and they are kind of [revengeful] with each other, and things like that." But let's see if this is the case in this presentation, later.

And there is another aspect, which is psychological aspect, which includes user anonymity and reflection. And some people believe that, because of the user anonymity, the online communication is, kind of, very uncertain activities between participants. It is, a bit, uncertain communication activity. But some people also say that, because of that user anonymity, people can actually express their opinions, even though they think of themselves as, kind of, marginal opinion and groups. So sometimes they internalize, and they kind of reinforce their opinions through the conversation with each other on the board. So sometimes it can help the users form a collective identity, through the identification of the groups of people on the board. So, because of the user anonymity, it is possible that people can find a way to break the tendency of [spiral] of silence on certain issues.

And another psychological aspect is reflection. It is, kind of, related to technological aspect, because it gives the - it enables users to observe and contemplate conversations on the board. Because they can have as much time as they want on the board, so they can observe any messages and any issues. So, because of those psychological aspect, there are, kind of, characteristic user categorizations - different from audiences of multimedia.

One of them is the "lurkers." Some people - it is defined as the people who visit online site and board, but they never discuss with each other. They just watch the other people's activities online. So we believe that they are very passive, and they are very - sometimes - elusive. Ah, detract - distract other peoples, and diminish the conversation activities online. But we should think about those lurkers, because those lurkers can be active, in that they observe and contemplate issues and messages posted online. And they form their political opinions through those, kind of, reflection. So I don't think this lurkers are passive. They are, kind of, active in, kind of, an invisible way. And their communication way is kind of unique and

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different from that of mass media. So for the research to be made on the activities of lurkers.

And there is a social aspect of online community forum, online public forum. What if - if there are - just a few people who can access to the Internet. And those new technologies out there. And then, the fancy technologies does not mean anything to those people. So the public policy influences the use-end, the nature of the public forums. And there is one reason I think why the US is different from the other countries, in the use-end and in constructing, kind of, a public sphere on the Internet. And there are ways, also, of public policy on censorship too.

For example, the China, there is [inaudible] going on out there. And that, actually, influence on the nature and conditions of political forums in the country. And the [inaudible] actually have an influence on the form and nature of the online forum. We will talk about this more in the following presentation. And the other regulators can include, can be include in [inaudible] laws.

So, what is my research here? As I said, my research purpose is: how is a communication technology constructed and used for public sphere in U.S.? So it is not about the fact of the new technologies, and it is not about the possibilities of the future of the new technologies. So it is trying to understand the U.S. culture. So, my question is: what are the characteristics of technological aspects of the online forums in online newspapers? So I will look at the forms and uses, in terms of format and interactivity and deliberation and things like that.

My method is content analysis. I sent to the 25 online local newspapers in U.S., out of Columbia Journalism Review website. Which he actually updates, the list of newspapers and the media [inaudible]. So I have 25 local online newspapers. And I found 12 online public forums out of those 25 newspapers. And I also took out messages from the bulletin boards, to look at the users. To look at the interactivity and deliberation among the online bulletin boards' users. So those are five publications Advance, Cox, Gannett, Hearst, Knight Ridder. And there are 25 just owned by those five publications. Measurement. To look at the form and uses, I focused on the format and usability, to see the form. And I look at the interactivity and deliberation to see the users. There are some concepts to - in terms of the format, I look at the bulletin board, is threaded format, or CDL format, or there is another format. And I also look at the location. Which means, where - how many - or where the bulletin board is embedded in the newspapers. I counted the - the steps, and I also look at the procedures for the users to actually use, and read, and post their messages.

The interactivity is defined in terms of responsiveness, which is developed by Rafaeli, which is an earlier researcher on the interactivity. So interactivity is defined as "the numbers of messages posted on the forum in response to the previous messages." So I looked at the messages clearly indicating the former or previous user, or the message. For example, if the message say, "Hey, hey someone," or something like that, then I thought that that is kind of one response, one way of response. So I

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counted that into interactivity. Deliberation as defined as "substantive and rational discussion." So I coded it in terms of the degree of knowledge and logic of the messages. I used a five-point article scale to code the deliberation, ranging from the very strongly agree to very strongly disagree, things like that. OK. So here are findings. I found twelve online forums out of 25 online newspapers. So the 52% has online forums. Advance has the five newspapers of Advance has the online forums. But the newspaper of Knight Ridder just have one newspapers which have online forum. So it kind of follows the publication companies, not the newspaper companies, which determine the adoption of the new technology. I looked at the format, and I found that the newspapers are sharing technologies. For example, the five newspapers of Advance share the same template of the online forums, even though the - each newspapers are located in different locales, they share the same template irregardless of the need of the local residents. And Star Ledger and Trenton Times, they use the same forums. I mean, the users are not differentiated from the newspapers. They share exactly the same forums together. So the Austin people share the forum, kind of, for example, with the people in Dallas, or something like that. Hm even though the issues, sometimes, might be different from locales. And the location and procedures. All of the - all of the twelve online forums require the user to log in the forum to read and post the messages. So, you can't read other people's message unless you log in. And 75% need, kind of, at least three links from the main page. And 67% needed at least five links from the main page. So it is, kind of you need, kind of, some works to do, to read and post a message.

In terms of users, actually, there are not so many people who use that. It is, kind of, not surprising. We think that there are not so many people who use the forums. So 41% has less than five users, and 33% has more than ten users. I found the number of messages per users is two. So this means regulars often come back and they post again. There are not so many variants in the uses, the users. Frequent regulars are just, they are the people who use the bulletin board. But you don't know the number of lurkers. The actual lurkers of the messages. And I will check their interactivity it is kind of high. There is high interactivity in the bulletin board. I think, because of the regulars, they conversation very heavily, so because of that, I think the interactivity is high. And deliberation surprisingly, the messages are very deliberative in the knowledges, and logical. The messages are very knowledgeable and logical. Seventy-two percent has shows, kind of, some knowledge and logic in their messages. This is example. This shows that - I chose a topic, war in Iraq, and they talked about that issue with varied knowledges. And some people are very vengeful with each other, because they have different political attitude. And there are some more examples.

So, this is my conclusion. Technology follows the market structure, not the technological preferences or the users' needed need. There is high-tech, but less, because you have to access those websites with, kind of some, effort. So I think that the online public forum is closed forum on the open network. Low participation and high interactivity. But there is deliberativity in discussion among regulars. So my recommendation is we need to look at the people who do not show their identity on the Internet. To articulate the process of the opinion. This is an example, of the Courier newspaper. If you click the news article, and you can directly see other

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people's messages here. It's under it's in the red box. But here, the one local newspaper show that, you have to click several times to see the title of the message. And you need to log in, here, to see the other messages. And this is an example it is the front page of one local newspaper. The red box means that this is the content that the content is developed by, and contributed by, the users. So the users are, kind of, located in front, not embedded in behind. So I think there is different, clearly different culture, public sphere, culture, between U.S. and Korea. So we need more, further, international comparisons, to understand U.S. public sphere culture.

Thank you.

MARK TREMAYNE: Thank you. Our remaining two papers concern blog - blogs, and specifically look at content of blogs. Our first up is Lou Rutigliano, a doctoral student in the School of Journalism here at UT.

LOU RUTIGLIANO: Alright. I'm Lou Rutigliano, from UT, and it was interesting to hear that, during the Q&A, we were talking about, what is the new model for media, and what will replace the mainstream. You know, who's got the answers and actually, I do have them, right here in this paper. [laughter]. Fortunately enough.

So, my paper looked at community web logs, and I think community web logs are of interest because they combine the hopes of the "We-Media" crowd, to make the media more of a public forum and increase participation from the public, with the desire of the traditional media to have a viable business model and remain relevant in the face of all this change online. If you thought there was a gap yesterday between online news and Wiki-news and then the traditional media panelists, they have nothing on Walter Lippmann, again, and John Dewey.

Back in the 20's, Lippmann wrote a book called Public Opinion, and he basically argued - and I'll read a quote from him - "Representative democracy won't work without an independent, expert organization, making the unseen facts intelligible to those who have to make the decisions." It was experts and decision-makers. The public is not as much of a factor here. Whereas Dewey I mean, Lippmann was making a pretty convincing and pragmatic case. Dewey responded to it as one of the most critical I guess Dewey felt that Lippmann's proposal was undemocratic. That it would create a depoliticized world, where the public sat on the sidelines while all the decisions were being made outside of their control. Dewey, instead, felt that the press's role was to create a public forum, where this exchange could go on, and that by abandoning that, they were leading the public to not have the opportunity to debate, to understand another person's opinion, to take action, and that those habits were going to atrophy in this sort of media environment. And with that, so would democracy.

Now, Lippmann's model is really what the traditional media is closer to. You might ask, "What would Dewey have done instead?" And I feel community weblogs are a good bet. Now, these are the traits that you commonly find when you look at the mission statements of some of the community weblogs in the US. And there's

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probably about a good dozen. They really are the closest thing we have in the US to online news, only they're still so new and in development that we see all different types of structures being experimented with.

And what you find, on community weblogs, is that they want the public to contribute the news, to self-generate the news, not just respond to the news. I mean, they're operating in a media vacuum. Which makes them a bit different from the weblogs that are more familiar today. It's using the weblog technology to allow the public to create its own news, and sort of develop these habits that Dewey thought were so important to democracy. And I'll - when you look at these traits, and you wonder "How can we measure if these weblogs are actually accomplishing what they say they're going to do?" I mean, how do you define activity and participation? And is it possible to measure democracy, if we're saying the media is more democratic?

Now, I've got this model here, with four factors. These four factors - I think if you compare the activity on a community weblog to these, you can get a good sense of if it's meeting its goals of creating this more open forum, and allowing people who didn't have a voice before to participate in the media.

Now, contributors. How many people are actually involved in posting to these weblogs? Who are they? Where are they coming from? How does that degree of participation really compare to the possible members and the audience that's out there? I mean, if it's just a handful of people using this community forum, it's really just becoming another broadcast outlet, in a lot of ways.

Interactivity. Same thing. Are the posts receiving feedback, and inspiring this debate, or is it just people, just kind of putting out things randomly that no one is really responding to and there's no dialogue?

Relationship to institutions. Are the people that are contributing just spokespeople from the government? Or someone that's using this community weblog to put the press releases out there? That they would usually have, in any other type of media?

And the level of control is really sort of the "freedom index." And these community weblogs, one of the big advantages of them, is that they invite so much participation that they can adapt and use their numbers to cover all kinds of different stories that, maybe, the traditional media couldn't, in the past. We saw a lot of references to the tsunami blog. That would be one example of the advantages of a decentralized, self-assembling form of media production. But, if you try to control it too much, you can suffocate it. So that's something else to look at.

Now, I think, looking at this model - lecture to conversation comparison that Dan Gillmor brought up yesterday - if we visualize a wide group of people contributing, talking to each other, free of direct influence from greater institutions, and doing it in this self-organized way, we can get close to what Dewey envisioned. And, maybe, find a way to get people a different type of media product, something that they may be looking for and not getting right now.

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So, another thing that Lippmann said was he had a line of public opinion where he sort of criticized the media and said, "It's a great idea, but there's always the murder of a beautiful theory by a gang of brutal facts." So, how does this model work? Is this conversational model, this ideal, this model, even a viable, possible thing?

So, in order to test this, I applied it to this community weblog that I started a year ago. And what we did was - I mean, this weblog, and let me tell you about it real quick. It's open to public participation, from whoever, from wherever. You sign up, you become a member, you can post. Anyone can comment. It has about 140 members, and most of them are in Austin, so I would consider it a community weblog for Austin.

Now, what I wanted to do with this is see if people have the potential to create their own news to find an event that was sort of in a media vacuum, where there was enough interest in it, but it wasn't really being covered by the media. There's enough going on that it required participation from the public. There was enough work to go around. So, that even was South by Southwest the unofficial version. Now, South by Southwest is a music festival that goes on here in Austin in March, that has this parallel conference that's really off the radar of all the media. We were going to try to cover this. It had the optimal conditions that we needed in order for the weblog to really test and see if it could operate on its own, if people could do this on their own. You have all kinds of free events going on around town, free music it was a very tough assignment, you know? [laughter]. But we did it.

So anyway, there were some interesting trends. And I know, I've gotta move it on, but things that came up. Self-generated coverage. Since this is operating on CMS, which is what most web logs operate on, it's really easy for people to just go to it and post without any sort of direction. Now, this is an example of a post from a woman who got a tip about an apparent conflict between two businesses. Within an hour and a half, she'd called her sources, done some first-hand observation, and posted something. Members build on the post, as the ability to add comments allows for this sort of distributed knowledge and - you know, still taking this "my readers know more than me concept." People would post and add to the information. The first one says, "There's free one-day passes available online." Later in the comments, it says, "Well, if you use a different email, you can get passes for every day." [laughter]. Yeah. So, they would work together. Now, online/offline interaction. There was a lot of times when people would be out in the field and call to someone else who was a member who had computer access, and ask them to post, and vice versa. And you would find a whole, sort of, relay of information going on.

Fourth, central control critical. As much as it's important to accommodate the decentralization, we also found a need for this central authority, as far as technical aspects go. This came up very early on in the event coverage; if there hadn't been a central figure there, it wouldn't've worked, because of a bug that took about two hours to fix.

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These conclusions, I think, can apply to a lot of community weblogs. And this whole, sort of, push to a new model. Untraditional content for an untraditional medium. Now we weren't covering City Hall, right? But it's because it's difficult to transfer that sort of institutional style of coverage that the media does to a community web log. People working 9 to 5. People have odd schedules, you know, a cultural/social sort of topic is something that's a better fit, perhaps. Overlap between the online/offline worlds there's a lot of criticism of the net being a place where people disappear into this virtual universe, and cut themselves off from the rest of humanity. But here, on a community weblog, you see an overlap - where people, from their online activity, are going to offline events, and vice versa. So it brings - it sort of bridges that virtual and real world.

Media as a service, rather than a product. This is where we start getting into that "playground" concept that online news has. People don't just go to the web log and then leave, they go, they stay, they talk, they go back. It's something that's sort of more of a presence throughout the day. Centralization ah. We needed a central authority. But that was really because it was something that was there from the beginning. So, if we had tried to be more decentralized from the start, maybe it would've been - we wouldn't have needed to rely on just one figure. Something to keep in mind, as we're trying to develop these more democratic spaces for online media. And I'll wrap it up there.

[Applause].

MARK TREMAYNE: OK. We have one more paper, and then we'll have a chance for questions. Our final presenter is Nikhil Moro, assistant professor at Kennesaw State University. And the paper is titled, "The First Amendment as a Frame: A Content Analysis of Top Blogs."

NIKHIL MORO: Hello, audience. Thanks for still being here. [laughter]. Well, my paper, now - I look at blogs critically.

Because blogs seem to be at a stage that Everett Rogers, the late Everett Rogers might have called the "cheerleading stage" - you know, where everyone says, "Oh, what a phenomenon; and they are going to upstage the mainstream media." And Jeff Jarvis, I believe, wrote in his blog - he's being cited by a few people - saying, "The Roman empire of the New York Times is crumbling, because of blogs - of bloggers like me." I mean, that's what Jeff Jarvis says, and several of his friends, Jay Rosen and Glenn Reynolds, and there seems to be this cheerleading kind of atmosphere out there, that people say, "What a fantastic" - you know - "development in the media," and it's this kind of but it's a fragmented discourse, no doubt, but does this fragmentation actually add up to a whole that is actually larger than the whole of the mainstream media? That's been the general tenor of the discourse surrounding blogging so far.

I, on the other hand, thought, "Let me see if the blogs are such a new phenomenon after all." I mean, do they have similar effects that the traditional, mainstream

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media have? You know, for example, agenda-setting. I believe Dr. McCombs was here yesterday. Some of you got a chance to talk to him, even though I did not. Agenda-setting; where, you know, people have observed that the media instruct us ah, what to think about. And if not exactly what, how to think, and so on.

A second effect is framing. And that's what - I've done some research on agenda-setting by bloggers, and this paper is about frames that bloggers tend to use. And I especially want to measure the frame of the First Amendment, because - given the nature of discourse surrounding blogging, I imagined that there'd be a lot of recourse to liberty arguments, in support of contentions, and so on, on the [inaudible] blogs. Dan Gillmor, who was here yesterday, highlighted - had highlighted in his book that blogs have blurred the lines between the producers of news and its consumers. He calls bloggers as the "citizen media." Conceived in this manner, blogs may be expected to use several tools, such as framing, that the mass media have traditionally used.

So, are blogs news producers? And here's a definition of what you might call a "news producer," from Tuchman. And blogs, I mean, by that definition, are indeed producers of news. And the media coverage, according to the framing effect, does not objectively reflect the world, because the media tend to create perspectives, which we call frames. It's not very different from the frame around a picture, which adds - creates, actually - perspective on the picture. So the media tend to discuss issues, report on issues, more frequently than actually discuss them, using frames. And the frame of civil liberties, more specifically the First Amendment, has often been a dominant frame. The First Amendment has been a dominant frame in media reporting. Loftin and a bunch of other political scientists have shown us that.

So I wanted to test this in the context of the blogs. So, a definition of frames: they are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world. They act as a tool to shape and manipulate information and influence how people understand issues and perceive themselves.

Marshall McLuhan. Try as we might to skip him, he keeps coming back as a theme in communication research, mass-comm research, and an amazing endurance for political communicator, now. He described the rise of the nation-state as a function of the mass medium. The greatest forms of the mass medium. The newspapers, and the - more especially, the electricity-driven media. He called it the "electric age." From that, understanding McLuhan's conceptualization of a nation-state, you might see blogs as creating what I like to call a "community state." At least, an electronic community state. And we heard some statistics earlier today, in the keynote address, that by the end of this year there should be about 10 million documented blogs, up from about 50 blogs that were documented in 1999. So in about six years you can see the growth of this medium.

And I've - it's a content analysis; my study's a content analysis. I used a list prepared by Drezner, of the ten most popular blogs that are read by the media

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elites. And that's [referring to the visual aid] the list of the blogs I read: the Daily Dish, InstaPundit, Kausfiles by Michael Kaus, the Corner, Talking Points, Media News, Drezner's blog, and so on. BoingBoing is now taken over by someone else, I just noticed. So it's kind of in flux, apparently. There's been some changes about who runs these blogs.

Here's the hypothesis I tested. The First Amendment is a predominant frame. By "predominant," I meant recurring. A frame that dominated discussion. And the presentation of news and commentary by the top political blogs, and the conclusion - to let the cat out of the bag - was that there was very clear evidence that this hypothesis was supported. I used content analysis as my method, best described by Krippendorff, probably, but I used Earl Babbie's 2000 book. And I have a more complete list of references, if anyone's interested in any of these scholars.

So, this study. Here's what I did. It was a close, textured reading of the ten most popular blogs over a period of five weeks, starting January the 1st, to identify the frequency of occurrence of a First Amendment frame. Specifically, I analyzed how often bloggers used values such as freedom of speech, freedom of expression, or other democratic liberties, as talking points in their commentaries or presentations of events.

One of the limitations of my study was that I did not measure an inner code of reliability, since I was the only coder. Maybe that's the next step, before I consider giving it - ah, submitting it for publication anywhere, and so on. But that's the limitation.

So, here's what I found. The First Amendment orders five constituent freedoms. The First Amendment, you know, forty-five words, but a lot of folks believe, the most important forty-five words in the Constitution. You know, gives us protection for five freedoms, essentially: of speech; the press; of assembly; of religion; and the freedom to petition the government for redressal of grievances. So, extremely important. And it's an extremely important conceptualization.

The First Amendment - I mean, for the most part, if you look at the communist countries, there is a lot of protection for free speech. But it is in the form of grants that the Constitution gives. The Constitution actually gives you the right to speak freely, in many communist countries. The American Constitution looks at it from the other angle. It actually assumes that you already have a natural right to free speech, and it merely protects that right. That's, I think, a really important difference, even though the net effect is approximately the same. How you approach free speech is quite different in America, from that angle.

More than a third of blog posts I found did use First Amendment frames. So, I read and analyzed 284 posts from these ten top blogs, spanning five weeks. And of them, 102 posts - 36%, that's more than a third - cited the First Amendment or one of its component freedoms to support an argument or to make a point. Freedom of speech and freedom of religion were the top two First Amendment frames. And these are the

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frequencies. Again, as I said, an inner code of reliability not tested yet, but I don't see how these given the limited number of posts I studied, why it shouldn't be a big problem at this stage, unless I expand my data set. So, freedom of speech, or "free speech," 21 times; of the press, 11; religion, 18; assembly or association, 10; and the freedom to redress grievances, 4. And the First Amendment itself, as a whole, was used 38 times as a frame.

Across the board - another important finding, actually, not stemming from my hypothesis, but I thought was an important addendum to a study like this - was the rigor in the arguments that bloggers made. I mean, they certainly want to persuade readers, there's no doubt about that. It's definitely not a passive medium, like - you know - like the editor of the New York Times said in a speech last week in New York City. Bloggers certainly don't want to be a passive medium. They actually are out there with an agenda, and are quite obviously not scared to hide that agenda. I mean, they don't have the same kind of responsibility that the gate keeping function bestows on the press, the mainstream media. And they seem to be taking full advantage of it. You know? A part of my discussion actually talks about First Amendment theory, and where Internet speech actually falls which kind of First Amendment - ah, the First Amendment has been interpreted by the Supreme Court at least four different ways in the last 110 years or so. And, if you look at scholarship instead, you have an entire gamut of approaches to the First Amendment, from Michael John to Edwin Baker and Thomas Emerson.

You have these, these old guys - now, I tried to fit the blogs into one of these categories, if possible. And I found that Jacques Derrida, the deconstructionist, probably came closest. He's associated with a lot of postmodern scholarship today, you know, Stanley Fish and so on, and here's what Derrida says in a recent translation: "We can no more imagine effective speech without there being self-representation than we can imagine the presentation of speech without there being effective speech. Free speech is just the name we give to verbal behavior that serves the substantive agendas that we wish to advance."

So these guys, the postmodernists, see free speech not in the split dichotomy that the traditional classicists tend to see it - like Thomas Emerson, for example. They see a difference between speech and action. It's a very clear dichotomy. The postmodernists, you know, actually say that free speech is a myth, because speech always furthers an agenda, and that agenda is decided by the individual's upbringing, and it's a cognitive product, really it's not merely as simple as to say, "Hey, speech is different from action." Speech is a form of action, and a really substantive fact in deciding personality, and so on. And the bloggers seem to give full support to that conceptualization of speech.

And I have, as I said, a discussion of the various paradigms of freedom of expression, I call it, you know; freedom of speech is one of the expressions in the First Amendment. So, the liberal and the libertarian, which I've classified together. Even though you might see - you might see libertarians as tending to be more close to the conservatives, sometimes, in viewpoints. But classical -definition of liberalism,

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actually, is a part of the Libertarian credo. And I'll be happy to talk about it; we just don't have the time right now. Then I have the utilitarian or the conservative paradigm; then, of course, critical culture and the postmodernists. And the postmodernist paradigm seems to suit the blogging medium the best.

So I hope to develop this farther into specific ways in which we might be able to reconceptualize a postmodern theory of free speech for the Internet, eventually. So that's where this research is headed.

Thanks. [Applause.]

MARK TREMAYNE: OK, I'd like to open it up for questions. I know we're really close to lunch, so let me just say a couple of words, and then we'll take your questions.

I think there's - we've heard, over the last two days - quite a bit of evidence that blogs are on the rise, readership of blogs is on the rise, and coverage in the press, to some degree. Rick's paper showed that there was a general rise in coverage of blogs during the presidential campaign and beyond. Nevertheless, you could point to - if you're a mainstream media organization, you could point to the fact that a recent survey by the Pew Center found that the majority of Americans have never - don't know what a blog is. Have never been to a blog. So you can kind of look at this two ways: it's on the rise, it's a big thing; on the other hand, most people don't know what it is.

I think, for mainstream media organizations, probably you could look at this phenomena as an opportunity - or possibly, I was thinking as I listened to these papers, as an opportunity lost. An opportunity in the sense that many of these bloggers are trying to provide - and often are - providing links, which means they're providing a source of traffic on the web to mainstream media sites. Some of those sites aren't making it easy to get in. With linking. Some of them have policies, or have had policies - and some still do - that, sort of, discourage certain types of linking into their content. This, I think, is counterintuitive, to say the least. If you're trying to get people to come to your site, you shouldn't be doing anything to sort of prevent people from linking in. Even if you're worried about unflattering links. I think any links to your site are probably good links.

But an opportunity lost is another way to look at this, because - as Young-Gil's paper points out - a lot of these news organizations have been experimenting with discussion forums for a long time. Really, for nine years, in many cases, these discussion forums have been offered by certain news sites. And yet, in many cases - and I think his paper was an example - they're not necessarily used that much. And if you have to click five links to find the forum, if it's buried somewhere on the bottom of the page, or the side of the page, you have to click a bunch of things to finally get in the forum, and then you have to register, and sometimes the registration form is quite long - are you really encouraging user participation on your site? And is that one of the reasons why the blogging phenomena has gone on outside of those mainstream sites?

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What if, for example, some of these online newspapers and broadcast news sites had done a better job of encouraging user participation and user publishing on their sites? And put the content on the front page, or - and I thought the strongest part of Young-Gil's paper was the conclusion, where we looked at the Korean news sites, and saw that on the front page, you had the list of stories and headlines, and then, also on the front page, on another half of the page, you had comments from readers. Right there, on the front page of the news site. Perhaps, if the U.S. news sites had done this, perhaps that's where the discussion of news would be going on. Perhaps it wouldn't be going on in the blogosphere. And I'm not sure if that would have been a good thing. [laughs] I mean, maybe it's better, the way it's developed, for society. But certainly, for those mainstream sites, maybe having all of that conversation, and activity, and those eyeballs Perhaps that would have been a good thing that they could have done, and perhaps it's not too late to at least take advantage of the fact that that discussion is going on, people are talking about current events, people are linking to mainstream organizations. Maybe we should find a way to be part of that sphere. And so, instead of a blogosphere, perhaps what we could have, even more, is a current events sphere. Instead of these somewhat more separate entities.

So. Saying that, I think that many of these papers touched on a lot of those issues, and I'd like to hear your questions for the panelists.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: A little comment, then a question. One of the main issues that was being discussed here is the role of blogs, the bloggers, as agents of power within the mediascape. And, for example, one of the conclusions that Richard Stevens drew from the Dan Rather case, and his content analysis of the coverage of blogs in the New York Times, was that blogs are not as powerful as they think they are, or as they claim they are.

And I think that, maybe, what we have to go a little bit more into is about the notion of power, that we may attribute to the actor as blog. I mean, the can we measure the power, and the mediatic relevance, of a blog just through the coverage New York Times gave to them, their appearance in the public discussion of blogs, during special, breaking news, special occasions? Also, the way they are legitimizing themselves by all the production, for example, of literature that we've had many authors of literature that they are producing now.

MARK TREMAYNE: Let's have the panelists think about that.

J. RICHARD STEVENS: Well, of course, there are many different ways of looking at power, and immediately I started thinking of Altschull, and Agents of Power, and a lot of the different ways to look at it. But specifically, what I was looking at was the power that they claim. I mean, of course, without that whole interaction, the CBS story would have unfolded very differently. I mean, there's a certain degree to which just raising the arguments is a form of power. But it's the specific frames I was looking at, where people, bloggers in particular, say, "Notice to the mainstream media: we're here, and you're going to take notice." And I'm like, "They're not taking

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notice." I mean, the ones that have noticed are noticing, and the ones that didn't notice before aren't really noticing now. I mean, it's just going to take a while. So, that specifically that's the particular type of power. But that's very we do need to look at many different levels, and layers, of our definitions of power.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I had a question for Young. Right now, and in the previous panels, we've been talking about how readership in the newspapers have been diminishing. And my question is about participation on forums. Do you think we're seeing that, in the U.S. it's difficult to access these websites, to get into a forum, so the lack of participation Do you think it's only the fact that it's difficult to access the websites, to not exactly invite people to participate, or is there also a factor in apathy, of people in the U.S.?

YOUNG-GIL CHAE: I think both of those are as I said, it's not just technological preferences. Technological opportunity does not guarantee that people participate in politics. I think, this may be a kind of cultural thing, too.

I showed you one example of a Korean newspaper. There is not advanced technologies in the newspapers. There is kind of a social mood, and kind of a cultural mood in Korea, right now, which actually pull or empower people pull people to participate in the political process in Korea. I think there is a more fundamental reason why there are so many successful media in Korea, and online news is one example. I don't think that their business model, and their the way they manage the websites guarantee the huge success. I think that the political culture, and political mood, in Korea actually is the basis of that success. And sure, technological limitations actually limit people from participation in the public discussion, too. That is one thing very easily we can change. So there is first step we have to take. Make technology more visible to more people. Make it more easier. So I don't think there is one fundamental reason why few people use bulletin boards.

LOU RUTIGLIANO: I think another thing that's interesting, too, is that you don't see much of an opportunity for people to participate in any institution, much less the media. Like, you go to a government website - correct me if I'm wrong, but in South Korea they have more interactivity on their government websites. They have public forums. But you go to, say, the state of Texas website, and what do they have? An email address, at the bottom of the page? I don't even know if that's there. But, you know, if people are going to start getting in the habit of interacting with these institutions, it has to be something that's across the board.

CINDY ROYAL: Hi, I'm Cindy Royal, and I'm a PhD student here at UT. And my question's for Lou. I think that the idea of community weblogs is really interesting, because it's different than looking at blogs as a soapbox, or "come look at what I have to say." And in regard to what you did with South by Southwest, I'm curious to know how much of the content was, like, these tips: where to get free food, what the day shows were, and how much was more coverage like, I noticed the Hole in the Wall construction, and conversations that people might have had about reviews of shows, or things that happened to them.

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The reason why I ask is that, many years ago I used to do a concert review website, and I tried to get people to write their own reviews; I had a guest review section, and a forum, and it's hard to get people to write reports. Especially when they're trying to have fun at South by Southwest. They're not going to go home at three o'clock in the morning and write a concert review. But it would be interesting to see if even a thread of "I saw this happen; did you see it too" occurred, in addition to these little tips or hints.

LOU RUTIGLIANO: A lot of the posts were along the lines of, sort of, a tip, something that somebody saw, and people asking questions about it. We did have some reviews, too, about some of the bands, with just some venues and people's observations about that, which was, like, that extra step of actually going out and experiencing something and reporting back about it, rather than just, like, putting up real brief bit of information.

So I think, across the whole membership, there was a lot of people that didn't participate, despite the fact that the conditions were really optimized for it. And that might have something to do with this whole "network theory," where a small percentage of people are going to contribute. And maybe it's just something that's unavoidable. In our case, it was 20% of the Austin membership that got involved in these conversations, which is what, traditionally, network theory will say. So maybe there's just laws, natural laws that we can't avoid, and you're not going to have full-blown participation. So. The participation that we did have was a pretty broad spectrum.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Long before Internet was in popular use, citizens' groups tried to, and still continue to, express their views in community radio and in community newspapers and other media. And from what I've heard, that tends to not come up at conferences like this. So I wonder if any of y'all have found any parallels in how citizen participation has unfolded online, in connection with other media. The person who actually invented the phrase - coined the phrase "citizens' media" is a communications scholar named Clemencia Rodriguez, who based her studies entirely on the participation of citizens in radio and video, and I know Lou has read that. But I wonder if any of y'all have also found connections with other media that unfolded offline.

J. RICHARD STEVENS: A good example of that. We do a lot of studies, whenever we talk about the impact of technology on our culture, a lot of times there are a lot of studies that are done on Amish communities, because they have very specific views use of it. However, it was pointed out to me by a colleague, one time, who had been recently in Pennsylvania and brought back an Amish magazine, that the way that they do journalism is very much like weblogging, in that they bring in there are specific community members and they basically just drop, side by side by side, "here's the community news." There's not really this centralized process of generating, here's the top, dominant story, and then here's down and that, to me,

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kind of is interesting. We always think weblogging is technology-based, and there is technology in that, but yeah, we do get locked into those frames.

NIKHIL MORO: [] talk radio, for example, as journalism. Coming to think of it as another medium. And we've really got to be very skeptical about "new effects," and so on, until we are able to find evidence of them. Because talk radio is criticized as trying to pass off as journalism when it is not. It's commentary, right? Blogging is commentary, too. It does not have the rigorous checks and balances that are more in the news production process. There's no doubt about that. So we've just got to accept that, I guess. At least for now, until it evolves, in the next few years.

MARK TREMAYNE: Thank you.

[applause]