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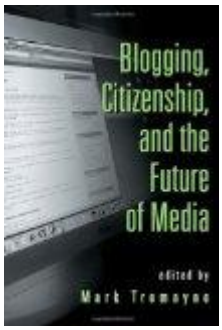
Mark Tremayne, ed. *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media.* London: Routledge, 2007. xix + 287 pp. $100.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-415-97939-9.



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The Blogging Revolution

This is an online (new media) review of an edited book (old media) about blogging (new media), and, as such, captures the dilemma of media in 2008. At a time when this review can be published virtually instantaneously--like the subjects of this book, blogs--the book itself required months, if not years, to complete the editing and publishing process. The book perfectly illustrates the dichotomy of media today. It is about blogs, which are evolving seemingly overnight, but the technology required in producing a book means that its account must necessarily take months or years to prepare. Authors must conduct their research and write their chapters, editors and reviewers must analyze each chapter with the usual give and take required to prepare chapters for print, the printer must set up the presses, the distributors must get the books to sales locations, etc.

As a practical matter, that means the book's information is old--at least in new media terms. For example, chapter 3 reports excellent scholarship by D. Travers Scott analyzing political winds in the 2004 U.S. presidential election. As a historical study, it's fine, and I loved reading it (although I teach journalism, my Ph.D. is in urban studies with a history emphasis, so, by training, I am a historian and inclined to love this sort of "slice of time" study). But, as a student of journalism, I notice that as I write this review another presidential election is well underway, and it may well have concluded before the finished review is published. Thus, this chapter works fine for historians, but does not offer a timely critique of blogging today.

Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media, edited by Mark Tremayne, assistant professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, offers fourteen essays on various aspects of blogging, divided into three parts: research using content analysis; examination of blog use, antecedents, and consequences; and five essays examining the impact of blogging on journalism. All

are good examples of scholarship, but all suffer from the same problem: timeframe. When print literacy replaced oral-based communication, time horizons changed for audiences as the new communication medium was permanent rather than locked in time. A book about blogging, the most immediate and personal aspect of the new media, it seems to me, emphasizes the limitation of writing, which locks knowledge into the time of publishing, while blogs can be and often are updated within minutes. A blog entry, even if just a few hours old, often seems overwhelmed by events. A book, by its very nature, becomes a historical artifact almost as soon as it is printed, and a book on blogging seems overwhelmed by the fact that it is locked in time. That does not mean that books on blogging are not important or valuable. Even when thought of as an artifact, this book is quite satisfying. The essays are uniformly informative and the essayists seem well-chosen.

Tremayne's *Blogging* is divided into three sections. The first section uses various content analysis studies to examine a variety of blogs. Tremayne starts out by addressing the hurdles of writing about blogs with a nice chapter by Susan C. Herring, Lois Ann Scheidt, Inna Kouper, and Elijah Wright that presents a longitudinal content analysis of blogs--but one that demonstrates the problems of reporting on this ephemeral medium. After offering their analysis of blog content, including, among other results, that external events have a strong impact on blogging, they report that "the random selection service [used in their study] has been discontinued, however, constraining our ability to extend the methodology of this this study to later samples" (p. 17). So, although their study could have been a good baseline, changing technology makes it problematic.

Scott's look at blogs and the 2004 presidential election offers important insights, finding that political blogs, although frequently not offering much original reporting, still perform traditional journalistic functions. Especially interesting is his observation that blogs seem to be performing surveillance on the media, having taken "the tools of the fourth estate and used them ***on*** [his emphasis] the fourth estate" (p. 142)

The middle third of the book offers four chapters on blogs and citizenship. Notable is Barbara K. Kaye's study utilizing uses and gratifications theory to study blogging motivations of both providers and audience. While not breaking new ground, this study reinforces observations of blog community-building functions as well as its role in reinforcing bloggers' preexisting opinions.

The final part overcomes some of the limitations of old media "time freezing" with a good discussion of the impact of blogging on journalism through the lens of legal issues (both domestic and international) and civic and citizen journalism. Again, not especially new, but perceptive is Laura Hendrickson's observation of how technology brings the cost of publishing down to a level that can turn anyone into a publisher. After all, blogs can be easily set up at the cost only of accessing the Internet, something that can be done for free at most libraries. She sees blogs with the advantages of both old and new media: inexpensive but with the power to reach many, giving them the potential to dramatically change journalism.

Still, perhaps most valuable to scholars are Tremayne's introduction and his final chapter, "Harnessing the Active Audience: Synthesizing Blog Research and Lessons for the Future of Media," as bookends for scholars. The backward-looking introduction, as is common in such volumes, sums up the core essays, but presents them within the context of a useful description of the history and structure of blogs. The forward-looking final chapter (chapter 14) both sums up the current state of blogging (at least at the time of publication), and uses the book's scholarship to venture some predictions on blogging and the new media. Among the more interesting (and, in some cases, problematic) are two: "Blogging ... will not

replace the functions of traditional journalism" (p. 268). He says that unless bloggers begin covering much more news--and on a daily basis--they will not replace mainstream media. As Web-based media (this seems not just blogging) moves more and more "hyperlocal," most of the content "will come from the audience" with a key to journalism's future being "the citizen journalist," he writes (p. 269).

"Citizen journalist" is one of those trendy terms that today's media loves so well. It is a handy catchall phrase used not only by Tremayne but also many other writers on new media topics for virtually all nonmainstream-media Web content providers. An earlier chapter in the book defines "citizen journalism" as a label "used to describe a form of media that involves moderated reader participation" (p. 240). This comes from a twenty-page chapter describing efforts to generate, moderate, or control "citizen journalism," and offers a useful discussion of a process that "reverses the sender-receiver process of traditional journalism," whereby the audience becomes the gatekeeper in selecting and presenting news with the journalist in a role of "shepherd," seeking out community voices and submissions (pp. 240-241). The problems faced here, as well as elsewhere in the literature, revolve around definitions. If "citizen journalism" is "moderated" reader participation, where does that leave bloggers Matt Drudge or Perez Hilton or a host of local political bloggers, all of whom seem to generate much of their own material? They both generate and moderate that material (even if all they are doing is commenting on news of the day), thus they are "citizen journalists" without the moderating function. Also, if that "audience" that Tremayne sees providing most of the content in the future is comprised of "citizen journalists" as described in the earlier chapter (and observed daily on the Web), where is the "journalism" part of citizen journalist? It isn't the journalism taught by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel in ***The Elements of Journalism*** (2001) with their emphasis on verification and on Walter Lippman's "journalism of verification."

Communication scholars have built a strong case for revolutionary changes in media resulting in revolutionary changes in content. ***Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media*** is a footbridge on the path that today's media is traveling, however unwillingly on the part of some, bridging the land mass of the old world of media and the still unexplored new frontier of blogging and the Internet.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at https://networks.h-net.org/jhistory

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