❖ Mark Tremayne (editor) — *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media*
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Reviewed by Fiona Martin

A decade ago, user-friendly software enabled blogging to become an everyday pursuit. This collection is a timely reminder of why the practice, which Jay Rosen called "a little First Amendment machine" for its emblematic carriage of personal speech, still attracts converts and polarises media workers. Editor Mark Tremayne has assembled a series of empirical studies of North American blogging in the mass communications tradition, to answer a series of questions: who writes blogs, who reads them, what for, and what are the implications of their activities?

Unlike some academic anthologies, *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Mass Media,* has a coherent focus. It gives a snapshot of blogging practices during a period of political upheaval in the United States and does not stray too far into the territory of related online or new media phenomena. Its three sections deal with blogging, bog readerships and interpretations of blogging as media work. Like many collections however the book's auxiliary titles are more a taxonomy of convenience than a systematic treatment of either citizenship online or media industries development.

There is no contextualization of those key issues at the start of each section, and thus readers are left to make their own sense of the relationship of individual articles to the theme. However with chapters from online academic veterans such as Susan C. Herring, Barbara K. Kaye and Clyde Bentley, the book is a useful contribution to understanding the intersection between public writing, publishing and media consumption.

The studies date mostly from 2003–2004 and it is dominated by the rhetoric of the Iraq campaign and the so-called 'war on terrorism'. This colours the citizenship research at the expense of other significant participatory issues for the US, including immigration, welfare and human rights. In turn one of the book's strengths is that it articulates a palette of creative identities for bloggers: as information aggregators, eye-witnesses, commentators and political lobbyists, media sources, health service consumers and activists, journalists, academics and, in large numbers, students. It also offers a range of methodological approaches that could readily be applied to other cultural contexts.

In the first section, the authors use various forms of content analysis to examine the writing of blogs and in particular assumptions made about the demographics and forms of blogging. Herring et al., for example, use a longitidudinal study of randomly sampled blogs over 18 months to chart how blogging has evolved and to theorise how political events may have influenced this process. The authors indicate that while war-related news events in the period may have influenced the production of greater numbers of blogs, those texts reviewed exhibited unexpectedly low levels of connectivity in terms of network links and comments and became more textual, rather than multimedial, over time. Chapters by Papacharissi and Travers Scott analyze blogs respectively as forms of self-expression and political activity. Both find that the narrative of the intrepid citizen journalist is overplayed in media studies literature, with self-referential story-telling and activist punditry being more prevalent that original reporting. The social benefits of blogging also emerge in accounts of political networking (Meraz), identity negotiation and narrative therapy as mental health support (Sundar et al.).

The book's second section, ostensibly exploring citizenship issues, is largely devoted to the users of political blogs. Barbara Kaye's chapter appears as the sole counterpoint examining motivations of blog readers by applying uses and gratifications theory. While the research here makes no revolutionary claims, it situates blog users as less homogenous and more active cross-media users than early writing in the field indicated. William Eveland and Ivan Dylko correlate two user studies to try and determine who reads such posts and how this practice might be connected to democratic participation — finding a link between blog reading and talk radio listening, but little evidence of an impact on readers' political practices and none for the existence of a conservative or liberal bias in readers of political blogs. In contrast, Johnson and Kaye's more targeted interest in warblog readers found a more Republican leaning cohort, one that relied more heavily on these sources of information about Iraq than on any other form of media. Troubling, if predictable in this educators' eyes, are the results from a comparative mock-blog reading trial (Kaid and Postelnicu): that the majority of young users surveyed did not question the credibility of political messages online, rating all sources equally regardless of expertise or relevance. What appeared to be Ben Affleck's blog views on social security rated higher on a credibility scale than those of a former Florida senator and political commentator.

The third section on the 'future of the media' is less about the broad sweep of industrial and social change of which blogging is symptomatic, than a successful engagement with localised journalism trends. It begins with deliberation on the question of whether bloggers should fairly be given the legal protections afforded journalists and media organisations, such as shield laws (where these exist). Laura Hendrickson seeks a functional definition of the press that might include bloggers who act as political commentators or watchdogs. Not surprisingly, she posits the act of providing material to 'of public interest and concern' as one fundamental factor in that definition. Lou Rutigliano draws loosely on systems theory concepts to analyse civic journalism communities. He proposes that three community network structures predominate, of which the most open and self-organising is also the least stable and innovative in content production, suggesting a role for journalists in managing user creativity. The team that built MyMissourian.com, a university-led citizen journalism initiative, then explores the impact of their project on their students and the surrounding community. The latter narrative is valuable in its unpacking of technical issues with customising open source software and the ethical debates that ensued from operating a multi-author community publication.

Despite increasing coverage of the field in recent years, the editor and writers do not assume reader familiarity with the structures or practices of blogging and so elements of this work could be used in undergraduate studies. At the same time a stronger editorial hand could have

been applied to the structure and narrative flow of the collection. There is much repetition of definitions and background between the studies and disappointingly little contextualization of the studies in a global or industrial sense. The exception to the US purview is Brian Carroll and Bob Franks's excellent lay survey of international legal issues thrown up by bloggers — including the Joseph Gutnick defamation case, which Dow Jones settled out of court. This article suggests a more interesting project for readers of this journal in comparative studies of blogging across geo-political, racial and cultural divides.

This collection certainly delivers on Tremayne's desire to nuance previous, utopian accounts of a North American blogosphere. Two factors would have strengthened the valuable analyses he presents: a pre-history of blogging, to better understand its rapid rise, and some further reflection on its costs, sustainability and incorporation by the mainstream. While the latter factors are touched on lightly, for example by Rutigliano, important questions remain about the fate of active audiences corralled and harnessed by established media in order to increase its relevance. Finally Tremayne's summary comments on the future of journalism practice — microlocalism, managed citizen, problem-based and database journalisms — deserved further elaboration in a separate publication. Hopefully this will not be long away.

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