

2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

Closing Session

Panelists:

Rosental Calmon Alves, Professor, Knight Chair in Journalism and UNESCO Chair in Communication, UT Austin

Mark Tremayne, Assistant Professor, School of Journalism, UT Austin

MARK TREMAYNE: [] about blog types. I just finished a book on blogging, and on research.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: A whole book?

MARK TREMAYNE: A whole book, yeah. It's an edited volume, and there's two articles in it that speak directly to that question, that went out and looked at - hard-to-do random sample - and figure out what's in the blogosphere. And both studies came to similar conclusions, and that is that, maybe, 70 to 80% of blogs are what we're calling "diary blogs" or "personal blogs."

And I think one way that the researchers are sort of looking at this question, and a way I think is kind of useful, is you have, sort of, inward-focusing blogs and outward-focusing blogs. It's not a clean distinction, cause you'll have some people who do both. But you have blogs where people are looking at what's going on in their lives, and they're diaries, essentially. And basically, the readership might be themselves, or it might be a few family members, or it might be a few friends. So it's sort of an inward-focus kind of thing.

And then there's these outward-focus blogs, that are looking out on the world. And the label that several researchers are now using are "filter blogs." For all of these, sort of, outward-focusing blogs. Because you look out, and you take some content from the world; you apply a filter. And you say "my blog is about this" - maybe it's not conscious, but you have a blog that has a topic. Maybe it's politics; maybe it's technology. Those are probably the two biggest ones. And then a bunch of other topics. And you filter things; you go out in the media world, and you select bits of things, and links and articles, and you write about things and you add your own thoughts.

So, those two categories: sort of the inward-focusing ones, that are "personal" or "diary," and then the outward one, the filter blogs. And then, within that, then there's political blogs you don't see a lot of people identifying themselves as a journalism blogger. Really, you see people identifying themselves as political bloggers. But a lot of them are doing what I might call "current events blogging;" they're just sort of blogging about whatever happens. I don't think they seem themselves as a news blogger. But they're just kind of looking at whatever's going on.

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Then there's sports blogs, and entertainment - there's actually a large, growing amount of entertainment blogs. Which, you know, threatens, potentially, to sort of take things over. But the percentage that I mentioned, 70 to 80%, that was based on studies, both of which were done about two years ago, the data. I think if you looked today, that percentage would be higher. Because there's been a real explosion in - ah - MySpace, to name one of the popular sites with young people.

ROSENAL CALMON ALVES: So, I wonder if - I, actually, I would like to invite you guys to come to the mic, and talk about what were the most important things that you - I mean, not all of them, because everything was very important, I know. But at least to one or two highlights that you got from this symposium, that you think - well, it was new or interesting, or that you were struck somehow with those. And I can talk a little bit about a couple of things; there are probably six or seven, actually. That I found, in this symposium, very important for me.

First, we start, again, with Dr. Picard's analysis, that was very solid. And the second panel that talked about the future, the present, of the newspaper in - sort of what I take from it, when you connect that economic reality that was shown with the other panels, with the blog impact on newspapers, for instance, which was an amazing set of knowledge also. And the social media phenomenon, out of the newspapers. And you connect this with the multimedia, in the end, which was the longest panel that I really - was really beyond my dream, in terms of discussion about new language that journalism, online journalism, is still, you know, searching for.

I see newspapers first, and journalism in general, in a sort of very deep transition. We really are putting the world upside down. I mean, we don't realize sometimes, because we became blas, regarding the changes. We look at something like the iPod, or the podcasting, and we just put this into "it's another one." I mean, "it's another thing." But I think we had, in these two days here, an opportunity to step back and to look at this in a different perspective. And see that we are creating, really, new paradigms in communication. And that - you know, Julia was talking about Richard Fidler's mediamorphosis, that talks about the evolution, and talks about what happened with new media in the past, when a new medium emerged. That was an earthquake, and then after the earthquake, everybody survived, and adapt, and coexistence, and evolved, and et cetera.

We are more like what I wrote in an article - and it actually was a presentation here in 99, and an article for a journal in 2001. That I talk about, let's talk also about mediacide. I mean, we can talk about mediamorphosis, but we must talk also about mediacide; about the end of certain types of media, the end of certain types of journalism, the end of certain types of careers. And we talked here, I mean we saw here, the editors of the main - some of the main news websites in this country talking about what journalism students should learn. And it is shocking, because maybe we are not teaching them all of that. Because it's still - we are still in the old paradigm, as a journalist is just a journalist. We don't care about technical aspects.

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And now we have those things merging, in a way I loved what Ashley Wells, from MSNBC.com, said. You know, that when he is hiring someone, he wants someone who knows lots of tools and software, and know one well. So it - journalism education, also, is going to die if it doesn't understand what is happening in the media. That this separation is different, now.

We are entering in an era of a generation that comes with cognitive abilities, that is different from my generation. Very different, I believe. My - I have small kids, and I think these kids have never seen the world that is not a database-based world. Has not - has never seen a society that is not a database-based society, like we have now. So I think one of the most fascinating things of this conference, for me, is what I wrote in this little message, well it was not that little, it was not that small, but anyway what I wrote about the bridge between researchers and professionals. If there is one thing that I'm very proud of, this small conference - that next year, I promise is going to be bigger, but not that bigger, because I think the intimacy is very important in this conference.

But - well, you know, this bridge. Because there are many conferences like that. There was someone saying, "Rosental, why are you doing this? Why you don't dedicate yourself to other things, to other areas? Academic areas? Because, I mean, why run a center that works with Latin American journalists?"

I teach international reporting, which is the area of foreign correspondence, et cetera. But this one has some big place in my heart, because I think one of the uniqueness of this conference is that you have professionals and you have researchers. On the same. Because, in the United States, there are lots of places where you can go for conferences on online journalism. Which, you know, professional industry, or - they called it "Freight Conferences." And you have lots of academic conferences. There are wonderful but this little, teeny-tiny thing from Austin, where we believe what starts here changes the world remember that? University of Texas at Austin? Yes? [he makes the "hook-em" gesture.] [laughter.] Ah, hook em, horns. [He makes the gesture again.] is different, because of that. So I hope you guys enjoyed this opportunity to, you know, knowing each other, and seeing what academics are doing, seeing what professionals are doing. And those are my only reflections about the conference.

I wonder if Mark wants to add something, especially because Mark is very important, because I think four years ago, I invited him for having lunch here, to say, "Mark, I want to put the researching ingredient in my online journalism conference." I think we have a great conference. It's a small ah, it started last century - 1999 [laughter] - and so it's getting, sort of, you know, traditional. In the beginning, it was hard to invite a professional to come here, to explain that this is serious. Now it's not hard, because they heard about it, they are happy to come. But I told Mark, "I think if we could do this" And he helped me to organize this, this component. And I wonder if you are happy with the result, so far?

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MARK TREMAYNE: Actually I've noticed, this year, and starting last year, that some of the things we talked about a couple of years before that, which seemed a little pie-in-the-sky to some people at the time, actually you're starting to see it reflected in online news products.

ROSENAL CALMON ALVES: Blogs!

MARK TREMAYNE: Well, actually, the interactive the blogs is a good example, because even two years ago, two or three years ago at this conference, you still had - even among people in online news - kind of a, "that's not journalism" kind of thing, and a little bit of "you're threatening our territory" kind of thing [laughs].

But we were talking about it at this conference, then, and now you're starting to see an embrace of it. You can tell, simply by going to online news sites, and you see the word "blog" all over the place. And some of what they're doing is labeling things as blogs which are pretty much columns, which now say "blog." And maybe yesterday's column is below today's column, and But some of it is actually, in the spirit, at least, of blogging. And actually, you're starting to see - I think some people mentioned - certain publications are - the Washington Post and some others - are putting their they've got a news story, and then embedded, right alongside of it, are links to the bloggers that are talking about that news story, or that topic.

So we're starting to see some interesting connections, and I don't know how much we have to do with that, and how much is just going to happen anyway, where we're both going down the same road. Both, sort of on the academic side and in the business world. But I'd like to think that, at least, forums like this one are an opportunity to share ideas. And in that spirit, maybe we should share ideas.

ROSENAL CALMON ALVES: I wonder if anybody has - Clyde, for instance - has a reflection about these two days. I think it's a good opportunity to

MARK TREMAYNE: If you want to speak to speak to any of the panelists that went earlier, some of them - most of them - many of them are here, so.

CLYDE BENTLEY: I'm Clyde Bentley, from the University of Missouri, which is the oldest - and we say, the greatest - journalism school in the world, but [laughter] And I'm also a Texas ex.

ROSENAL CALMON ALVES: Yes, he is, and hook em horns.

MARK TREMAYNE: We train the journalists that

ROSENAL CALMON ALVES: that go to Missouri. [they laugh.]

CLYDE BENTLEY: And, of course, I'm an Oregon duck, too, so "quack, quack."

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I think there were a couple of issues here that are really important to think about. I was last here two years ago, and Mark, I don't remember much talk about blogs at all two years ago. We were talking about web pages, and where things are going, but the big issue was, just back two years ago, even, that online was going to replace most of what we talk about in journalism. But what I heard today was not that, but - today and yesterday - but that we're now looking at taking the best of the old media, and the best of the developing media, and creating something that's "the new best." And I think that's one of the things that's a very refreshing idea out here, that we're not just looking at this whole notion of a zero-sum game. And that's going to be very important.

The second one - and I work in citizen journalism, and of course, that's a very new area here. And it really goes back to something else. And what I also found very refreshing, from conferences I was in last time. The fear of people who did not go to the University of Texas and did not go to the University of Missouri and did not go to the University of Oregon is slowly evaporating. And we're getting this notion that citizens do have the right to say something in a journalistic way. And whether we call that citizen journalism, or blogs, or open source journalism, or what, we're starting to comprehend that there's more to the world than something that you learn just in journalism school. And I think, in the long run, that's very good for democracy, and very good for citizens of the world.

So I'm looking forward to future conferences, to see where that evolves. Good job. Thank you.

ROSENAL CALMON ALVES: Good. Thank you. Anybody else wants to have the floor? Or you're too tired?

So, if you're too tired, let me finish up, just thanking everybody for coming here. I mean, thinking that Vincent came from South Africa, a few hours of flight and bad sleep. And you know, people - lots of people from Latin America and from all over the country I'm very thankful for you. I'm thankful for Amy Schmitz Weiss, who has been helping this symposium since she came here as a master's student, and has been tireless doing this. And everybody from the Knight Center, the people who are helping with the video and the sound, and the tech team of the University of Texas. Everybody - you know, this started, like I say in my message in the print program. You know, we like print. [laughter] In the print program this started with just me, and now this is the work of a lot of people. So I want, from the bottom of my heart, to thank everybody. I'm not going to name everybody, but I want to thank everybody for the help.

So, see you next year! Bye-bye, millions there! [he waves to the camera.] Bye-bye!

[applause]