Histories of blogging

Tim Highfield
QUT Digital Media Research Centre

Abstract

In the early to mid-2000s, at the height of 'Web 2.0', blogs represented many potential ideals: the ability for anyone to publish what they wanted; the possibility of an audience of millions; the ability to break news and change politics. But these ideals are just a small part of what blogging was, and what it continues to be. This chapter examines the evolution of blogging as practice, genre, and influence, as key elements that defined the 'web log' as such have become adopted and standardized in contexts that otherwise might not be considered 'blogs'. From personal reflections on LiveJournal to international communities of mp3 bloggers, citizen journalism from around the world and news websites live-blogging developments as they happen, blogging took, and continues to take, many forms. This chapter provides an overview of this diversity and the changes of forms and perceptions around blogging, including in response to the popularity of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr.

Introduction

Writing in 2014, blogging's moment as an innovative and popular social medium – before 'social media' became a thing – seems, in internet time, like the distant past. Long since surpassed in public awareness and in global user base by social networking sites and social media like Facebook and Twitter, blogs can seem, particularly to a Western perspective, to be quaint but passé, a signifier of the Web 2.0 era, in the same way that domains like Geocities and Lycos firmly belong to the internet of the 1990s. Yet while blogging might not attract the same attention or importance as it did in the mid-2000s, the medium is not dead: blogs occupy a place in the mediasphere, in connection, not competition, with social media, with their respective uses reflecting the strengths and affordances of each platform. Furthermore, the influence of blogging can be perceived in many common features of online content, whether in style or in functionality. Finally, even if the moment for blogs within particular genres peaked before Twitter became a default platform for unfolding commentary, to argue that all blogging is finished is to overlook the ways that blogs are employed for diverse subjects, from activism to fashion, and in non-Western contexts or for international audiences.

This chapter provides a brief sketch of the history of blogging, as platform, genre, and influence. The focus here is not on any one particular use of blogs: some genres of blogging, while notable, are well-established in research literature, but the blogosphere was never just a space for talking about politics or celebrity gossip, or acting as an online version of personal diaries. While this chapter does make reference to key events in the public awareness of blogging – especially the ways that older and newer media interacted – this is not the history of the political blogosphere. The public perception (and the mainstream media image) of blogging is important for understanding how practices of blogging were positioned and evolved over time. The history of blogging is part of the wider development of the mediasphere, for bloggers were not just bloggers, posting their own thoughts: they were readers of other blogs and media sources, commenting, linking to, and sharing other content, and also used other platforms in addition to their blogs. To study the history of blogs, then, we need to understand not just what are blogs, but what *were* blogs – what did blogging mean in 1997, 2002, 2006, or 2010, and what might it mean beyond this point? 'Blog' might be a truncation of 'web log', a reflection of initial uses of blogs as personal journals when the form first emerged in the late 1990s, but that in itself does not tell the story of what blogging became.

What is/was blogging?

Defining blogs has proved a complex dilemma, since the uses and genres of blogging demonstrate a wide range of practices (Bruns & Jacobs 2006; Walker Rettberg 2008). These various approaches might not share any overlaps beyond the platform used – and unlike Twitter, Facebook, or Tumblr, blogging research often featured less on an individual platform like Blogger or Wordpress, but rather on groups of blogs which might include sites hosted by individuals as well as blogs set up on services such as LiveJournal, Over-Blog, Windows Live Spaces, and Skyblog. This lack of consistency helped promote the diversity of the blogosphere, allowing users to have more freedom with what they presented than would be

found later in more uniform social media; this also meant that no one service became synonymous for 'blogging'.

Rather, definitions of 'blog' focused on common structural elements that set blogging apart from other, contemporary forms of online communication: such defining attributes included presenting posts in reverse-chronological order; blog posts as discrete entities within the blog itself (with their own, unique links); the ability for readers to add comments to posts; the use of RSS as automatic notifications of new posts; sections such as blogrolls – lists of links to sites of interest or affiliation, often provided in a static sidebar – and the inclusion of non-textual content (images, videos, audio, as well as topical links to other sites) within blog posts (Schmidt 2007). Some services provided different approaches to these common traits: LiveJournal, for instance, mixed elements of blogging with what would become central characteristics of social networking sites using boyd and Ellison's (2008) definition, with users curating their own lists of friends and connections on the site.

The name LiveJournal also reflects the personal nature of early blogs; the precursors to the automated publication, centrally-hosted, WYSIWYG-editing blogs of LiveJournal and Blogger (both launched in 1999), for instance, include personal home pages manually updated with news and lists of links of interest. By 2002, blogging was established enough to have already received one historical overview (Blood 2002), and while the personal diaries remained popular uses of blogging, its genre coverage was growing. If a blog had a topical focus, though, this did not mean that it was not also a personal record: indeed, part of the buzz surrounding blogging was that it provided a means for people not part of the traditional media to share their opinions and expertise, their analysis, content, and commentary. Services like Blogger and Wordpress meant that the levels of technical literacy (and finances) required to set up a personal webpage were suddenly diminished, making online channels a space for more voices to be shared, if not heard. Although the democratic potential and reality of the internet remains a topic of extensive debate (Hindman 2009) – whether for political purposes or just giving marginalized voices a platform to effectively spread their messages – and other social, political, and technical factors also impacted upon who could and did blog, the rise of blogging did reduce some barriers to participation online.

Not only did discourse around blogging involve the potential for anyone to start blogging (although this was not without its critics - see Keen 2007), but also there was the possibility that anyone's blog could find itself with an audience of millions; while readership for many blogs remained low (see the critiques by Lovink 2008) – and having a new, extended but unknown, audience was not necessarily the aim for all bloggers – publicly publishing posts online could also bring readers in on delay, who found the content after the fact. At their most extreme – and as with other widely-shared material on social media that might go viral (Nahon & Hemsley 2013) – a blogger might suddenly receive an extensive audience (whether temporary or lasting). The blog posts of Salam Pax, for example, during the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 – initially intended as a personal exchange with a friend – attracted international attention for their civilian perspective from the ground in Baghdad (Zuckerman 2008). During crises, content shared by bloggers might become important primary sources, including as part of citizen journalism initiatives; the publication of media and updates during the terrorist attacks in New York City on 11 September 2001, the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004, and the bombings in London in July 2005, for example, made use of blogs, among other channels, for information dissemination (Gillmor 2006).

Blogging and citizen journalism are not the same thing, but have an overlap in practices (Bruns 2005): citizen journalists may use blogs to share their reports and content, and bloggers might carry out citizen journalism. However, blogs are not the only platforms used by citizen journalists, and many bloggers were concerned with topics other than documenting civic life. Similarly, providing citizen analysis and commentary, as political and news bloggers might do, is not necessarily citizen journalism but more akin to opinion and editorial pieces. Bloggers and citizen journalists, though, did both form part of the same discussions around the legal status and ethical responsibilities for online publications, since unlike journalists, bloggers had no explicit code of ethics; such questions arose as part of blogging's historical trajectory from new platform with small user base, to alternative media with growing public awareness and uncertainty, to established and known medium.

These questions were not just for political bloggers, though; the public nature of much blogging and the accompanying trends of Web 2.0 and social networking sites encouraged internet users to post personal thoughts, opinions, and media content online. The popularity of celebrity-oriented blogs such as *Perez Hilton* and *D-Listed*, and blog communities like *Oh No They Didn't* demonstrate the audience for gossip and rumour, but the associated risks of publishing illicit, libelous, and defamatory material, as well as illegally-obtained, can also lead to litigation. Using blogs to share copyrighted material, too, could cause problems; the rise of mp3 blogs in the mid-2000s, and especially their own moment within indie music circles as arbiters of taste, helped to break new bands and make songs available to new audiences (Borschke 2012; Baym & Burnett 2009). This sometimes took place with the approval of bands or labels (or was done by them), but mp3 bloggers would also post material without permission, which could cause sites to be deleted and material removed without warning (Harvey 2013).

The growing popularity of blogging also led to a diverse range of blogging genres: in addition to politics, news, and personal diaries, blogs featured topics from music and food to parenting, lifestyle, education, sport, technology, and travel, while styles of blogging, from sharing lists of links to primarily posting photos or videos, also instigated new genres. The rise of blogging genres could lead to the development of close-knit communities of interest and support, with networks of parenting blogs, including the sub-genre of 'mummy bloggers', and health-related blogs documenting illnesses, disorders, and disability (Yeshua-Katz & Martins 2013; Goggin & Noonan 2006). Australian and New Zealand feminist bloggers, too, reinforced the connections between bloggers by running a monthly 'carnival' wherein one blogger hosted submissions from others in the community (Down Under Feminists' Carnival n.d.).

Blogging was also a support and promotional outlet for other fields; in education, for instance, blogs were used in classes, and academics blogged to promote work-in-progress, share their research and publications, and discuss related topics (Mewburn & Thomson 2013). Lifestyle bloggers, meanwhile, used their blogs to promote products and events, from fashion (Sedeke & Arora 2013; Rocamora 2012) to food (Lofgren 2013); as their audiences grew and individual bloggers' reputations as 'new influencers' became apparent (Trammell & Keshelashviki 2005), lifestyle bloggers in particular were approached by companies for paid promotions. The personal voice and authenticity of blog posts appealed as an alternative approach to advertising – and was a reason why the bloggers had attracted an audience – although bloggers posting 'advertorials' (especially without disclosing the nature of the post) were not universally approved of by their readers (Hopkins & Thomas 2011). These diverse

practices also place blogging within a wider internet history; that of internet culture and the presentation and distribution of popular culture online, of copyright and privacy and piracy, of amateur experts, user-generated content, and taste cultures. While blogging was a specific approach to posting content and media online, then, it was not an approach that developed in isolation, free from any other contextual factors.

Although much attention was given to blogging's impact on public discourse through its textual content, allowing individuals a 'voice' through the written word, other blogging genres developed that primarily focused on other media forms. Photoblogs, for instance, used the blog format to promote an individual's photographs (Cohen 2005), and many blogs would mix media forms. Podcasts, too, used some of the same technological elements as blogs, in particular RSS, to share audio productions (Jarrett 2009). Other approaches might use blog-related nomenclature without always being blog-like: 'vloggers', for example, described video blogs, where users would post videos that contained personal views and commentary in the same way as a blog post. With the rise of YouTube in particular, though, 'vlogging' also became used to describe a specific aesthetic, of 'a talking head speaking straight-to-camera… [discussing] domestic, personal politics' (Burgess & Green 2009: 28). Since the structural elements of the standard blogging definition might not be present here, vlogging in particular quickly evolved to mean something similar, yet detached, to the first blogs.

Blogging genres promoted the formation of communities of interest around topics and approaches. These were not discrete spaces, either, as overlaps and further topical specialization took place. A genre-oriented blogosphere connected several themes, and contained several sub-themes within it. The Australian political blogosphere was not just a space for bloggers to discuss partisan politics, but also included sites analyzing political topics from, for example, economic, psephological, and feminist perspectives (for the latter especially, see Shaw 2012a; 2012b). These spaces intersected to extend the scope of commentary and analysis, and to respond to their discussions and leading questions. Similarly, analysis of blogospheres identified by common languages, from Farsi to Arabic, identified the presence of distinct but interconnected communities of interest, covering topics from politics to poetry (Kelly & Etling 2008; Etling et al. 2010).

Such overlaps also serve to connect international audiences. While regional blogospheres might primarily communicate in their local languages, there is a sub-category of bridge-bloggers (Zuckerman 2008) who might write about the same topics, and collate information from other bloggers, but in other languages to make this content accessible to other readers. Zuckerman identified bridge-bloggers in several African nations and MacKinnon (2008) studied bridge-bloggers in China, highlighting both the take-up of blogging in non-Western contexts and the appeal of international commentary (although writing in a non-native language does not necessarily mean that bridge-blogging is the intention; see de Vries 2009). The bridge-blogging function was formalized further by the development of projects such as *Global Voices* (n.d.), which aggregate and host commentary from international bloggers and promote these views, in a clear and centralized manner, to a global audience (Russell 2009).

Global Voices and similar projects can mix elements of citizen journalism and blogging, providing a means for sharing views and reports from uncertain social, political, and media situations, circumventing surveillance and media controls. Such aims are not a prerequisite for international connections, though: other initiatives that recognized and promoted the

global blogosphere, and its common approaches, were based on shared topics of interest. The *Music Alliance Pact* (MAP), for instance, was launched in 2008 as a collective of mp3 blogs from different countries, each contributing one song per month from artists from their countries and promoting the entire month's list on their own sites (Connor 2008). As well as the US and the UK, the *MAP* grew to include bloggers from Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Korea, Sweden, Chile, and others, presenting the (music/mp3) blogosphere as a global village connected through their enjoyment of music. The taste cultures promoted by the bloggers concerned might determine the type of music promoted, but a project like *MAP* shows the rise of similar approaches to blogging around the world; the blog as a space for sharing content, promoting subjects, and posting personal commentary was not a Western-only approach, and mp3 blogs, as one generic example, were adopted by international bloggers (see also international coverage of local music scenes, as noted by Baym & Burnett 2009).

Indeed, although their catalysts and topics might vary drastically, global blogging and blogs in languages other than English displayed various common approaches and uses (Russell & Echchaibi 2009). Regional and language-specific platforms provided opportunities for national blog networks to develop: particularly before popular English-language platforms became internationalized, with dashboards in multiple languages, local blogging services were widely used. In South Korea, for instance, popular services included Cyworld, which shared characteristics with blogs while also being more than just a blog host, pre-empting elements of social media platforms (Kim & Yun 2008; Choi 2006). French bloggers, meanwhile, could set up blogs using services provided by mainstream media organizations, such as the *Le Monde* newspaper and the *Skyrock* radio network. Other nations took to English-language platforms en masse: Russian bloggers' adoption of LiveJournal, for instance, reflected the availability of Russian-language interfaces and the perceived benefit of user data being stored outside Russia (see Alexanyan & Koltsova 2009). Indeed, the tension between public communication through blogs, surveillance, and users' data was also a factor for international bloggers, from French bloggers being arrested on suspicion of posting messages to their Skyblog blogs inciting violence during riots in 2005 (Russell 2007), to bloggers – and other prominent voices on social media – being targeted and arrested during the Arab Spring series of uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East in 2010 and 2011 (Howard & Hussain 2011). These tensions remain a concern for online activity in general, beyond the blogosphere and beyond political unrest.

Perceptions of blogging

The history of blogging is also a history of changing perspectives and disputes around the value and contribution of blogs, and online communication in general. Blogging fits into the historical narrative around user-generated content and participatory media, and the convergence between old and new media forms (Jenkins 2006). From an alternative practice, blogging's growing popularity saw it become first challenged and criticized, and then adopted and integrated into the digital strategies of traditional media; for political and news blogs in particular, the increased attention and apparent status of bloggers within discussions online – as well as bloggers' willingness to critique the work of the mainstream media – led to editorials attacking blogging in general and individual bloggers specifically

(Highfield & Bruns, 2012). Yet this was also not a universal strategy, and some traditional media, especially those investing in digital presences, were more willing to start blogging.

The rationale behind media campaigns against bloggers, especially Western political blogging, can perhaps be attributed to several key events that demonstrated (in the US) the power and presence of blogs as new and 'dangerous' media; these include the use of blogs and the internet in general for grassroots support in Howard Dean's unsuccessful 2004 Presidential bid; the 2004 resignation of veteran *60 Minutes* anchor Dan Rather after bloggers helped break a story that the program had used erroneous documents in a story about then-President George W. Bush's military record; and the 2002 resignation of Senate Majority leader Trent Lott following the publication of seemingly pro-segregation remarks which were spread by bloggers (Hindman 2009; Munger 2008; Gillmor 2006). The fact that these events from the early 2000s remained watershed moments for the blogosphere's impact also demonstrates that its peak as a new force in the mediasphere was not long-lasting: this is not to say that bloggers had limited achievements, but rather that after this period they were a more known group, and so could be monitored. The same developments happened with social media: tracking topics of interest and buzz on these platforms as well as in other media is a key part of journalistic strategy.

Monitoring social media buzz also demonstrates a change in the perception of the users involved in these spaces: despite the potential for new and marginalized voices to be heard through blogs, and for more diversity in discussions, there were also fears that the blogosphere would be an example of cyberbalkanization rather than an open, public forum (Sunstein 2008). Instead of being a revitalized or reimagined public sphere, the blogosphere might fragment into distributed and isolated communities of like-minded voices following principles of homophily: for the political blogosphere especially, separating into ideological clusters could cause an echo chamber effect, where individuals are only exposed to views they agree with, and which repeatedly get reinforced (see Meraz 2011). These fears were not entirely realized; while political blogs did demonstrate at various points ideological clustering, this was not at the expense of being aware of, and linking to views from oppositional blogs and media sources (including in critique) (Shaw & Benkler 2012; Adamic & Glance 2005). Other criticisms and derogatory views of bloggers saw political and news blogs, specifically, dismissed by some mainstream media outlets as being run from bedrooms by people in their pyjamas (see Jones & Himelboim 2010); this was despite the expertise of many bloggers in their fields of interest rather than journalism, and indeed despite the growing influx of professionals into blogging too. Journalist blogs, for instance, became channels for journalists to post material both as part of their professional work on their parent organization's sites, and on personal blogs (Singer 2005; Garden 2010).

For some bloggers, their work could lead them to celebrity status; vloggers such as LonelyGirl15, for instance, became prominent through the originality and nature of their content – although the authenticity of LonelyGirl15 was also disputed and later confirmed to be a commercial promotion (Burgess & Green 2009). Celebrity status could also occur as part of the overall, elite blogging 'A-list', or within a blogger's own circles: bloggers could become micro-celebrities (see Marwick & boyd 2011; Senft 2013), due to their status as influencers for their readers. Popular and original blogs could also see their work extend into other forms, such as book deals: the *Julie and Julia* project, for example, started as a blog dedicated to trying each recipe in Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (Powell 2002), became a book, and was subsequently adapted into a film (Ephron 2009). While such

cases are outliers for the blogosphere at large, since millions of blogs might only receive reader numbers in the tens rather than the thousands, let alone see their posts edited into books, they also demonstrate how sites can achieve clear prominence in the wider public consciousness, beyond a blog-specific (or internet-only) context. Furthermore, even if bloggers are no longer achieving such popularity, similar trends can be seen with other social media platforms, as books are published based on prominent Twitter accounts and hashtags, from comedic intentions to social justice movements and projects combatting social issues (Bates 2014).

Developments like Google purchasing Blogger and the integration of blogging into news and commentary sites and portals demonstrate the acceptance of blogs, the prominence of blogging within the popular consciousness. Individuals could blog for free, but the decision to invest millions of dollars into blogging platforms and infrastructure shows a recognition of blogs as a component of online culture and the mediasphere. From a new and alternative practice to the mainstreaming of blogging and evolving approaches, blogs – and bloggers as unique voices, new influencers, and topical experts – occupied key positions in the extended mediasphere. As a new social media ecology developed, with the growing popularity of centralized sites such as Facebook and Twitter, public attention moved to these newer platforms; however, even if blogging's major points of public, cultural, or political impact had passed in Western contexts, this does not mean that the blogosphere became a ghost town as more and more users signed up to Facebook.

Youth culture killed my blog?

The Western blogging moment was exactly that: 'peak blog' (to use current but almost inevitably immediately dated parlance) came and went as blogging transitioned from being something new to an established and accepted practice online. However, the uses and popularity of blogs as active pursuits continued unabated even with the rise of newer platforms. Furthermore, the affordances that enabled casual internet users without extensive technical literacies to start blogging continued to develop, leading to the growth of social networking sites and social media which built on blogging's achievements and made them even more accessible to a wider internet population.

Blogging's appeal lay in part in the ability for users to create their own websites, for free, without needing to know how to code, pay for hosting or domain names, and post the content they wanted to; these may be as part of explicit networks of friends and other users of interest (such as LiveJournal), or in more discrete arrangements where networks and connections were articulated through lists of links or citations in blog posts. This latter situation, though, did not create the same centralized feel – and content feeds – for networks: multiple friends might all have blogs on Blogger or Wordpress, for instance, but these hosts did not initially offer a way for a user to see all posts by their friends in one place. RSS readers created a means for aggregating these posts, from multiple blogging hosts; the discontinuation of popular RSS services like Google Reader (in 2013) is perhaps reflective of the transition from requiring such aggregators to centralized feeds on single platforms and indeed of different modes of content provision and readership (mobile apps, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, and more).

The importance of centralization can be seen in the popularity of social media like Facebook, especially in that site's mid-2000s tussle for user numbers with MySpace; by offering users not only the opportunity to create their own profile, and share content and comments, for free, but also the ability to connect to friends' Facebook profiles and have friends' posts appear in an aggregated feed, Facebook used successful elements of blogs to shape online social networking. At the same time, neither Facebook nor MySpace was a blogging platform: while MySpace included a blog function, and the reverse chronology of the Facebook news feed (now just one option for displaying content) and the space for personal expression and sharing reflected elements of blogs, these platforms were not designed as blogs. Facebook's uses surpassed blog-like activities with the introduction of third-party apps and features like pages and groups; meanwhile, its blog equivalent, the Notes feature, declined in visibility over time and with site redesigns.

The integration of blog-like functionalities into social networking sites, social media, and indeed to other websites, highlights the transition from blogging alone to blogging within: rather than blogs being individual, stand-alone sites, they (or their equivalents) became additional elements of extended websites and online platforms. Users do not employ one single social media platform or app to post content or commentary and make connections with others, but instead are active on the likes of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Tinder, Tumblr, and Pinterest, and many more (including more niche platforms), simultaneously or through linked profiles, and for different purposes and audiences; similarly, blogs became one aspect of a social media ecology that were read and written, shared and commented on, but not the sole destination or outlet.

This transition is underlined by the growth of Twitter in particular. The 140-character limit for tweets helped encourage Twitter's promotion as a 'microblogging' platform (as was also the case for the Chinese-language Weibo), yet while elements such as the reverse chronological display of content have become standard in such spaces, Twitter's uses extend beyond those of blogs (see Weller et al. 2013). These are in part due to the different affordances and norms of Twitter and blogs, and the different populations using these platforms; interpersonal communication, including among friends and acquaintances but also encompassing celebrities, politicians, and organizations, are (in a Western context especially) more commonplace on Twitter than blogs for the simple reason that Twitter is more widely used. Indeed, Twitter allows for the personal posting of comments and content, of linking to other content of interest, and sharing other peoples' thoughts, without the same amount of effort for creating and maintaining a blog (with tweets actively promoting concision rather than long-form commentary).

Tumblr is another social media platforms which could be seen as a successor to, or descendant of, blogging in its mid-2000s guise; in mixing functionalities of Twitter and blogging, Tumblr still maintains blogging terminology – its retweeting equivalent is 'reblogging' – yet the cultural practices of Tumblr differ to the traditional styles of blogging (Walker Rettberg 2014). While Tumblr users can post long-form writing, the platform is also a space for mixing comments and reactions with photos and other visual material, especially animated gifs drawn and recontextualized from popular culture sources. Of course, as noted earlier, image-driven blogs were popular practices, such as photoblogs; yet Tumblr is not just a space for original content, but is at times more a platform for mixing and appropriating content from various sources to provide commentary and entertainment.

The popularity of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr demonstrate the move towards social media as opposed to blogging, focusing on smaller pieces of content and commentary, centralized content and audiences, and especially mobile-friendly content (in terms of reading and contributing). Similarly, popular opinion and cultural websites, such as *Jezebel* and *io9*, reflect the morphing of blogging and other discussion-oriented platforms – and indeed the integration of social media profiles for comments. The adoption and adaptation of blogging affordances, especially the reverse-chronological display of content as standard, reflects the impact blogging had on web development, but what is also clear is that blogging is just one part of a wider, evolving social media ecology (Bruns & Highfield, 2012). These different platforms work in tandem, though, rather than competition: when news sites such as *The Guardian* cover breaking news (including crises, press conferences, parliamentary debates, or sports), they employ a live blog format with new posts for each update over the course of the event (Thurman & Walters 2013). The blog serves a further aggregational function, for not only does it let journalists provide more extended posts than would fit in a tweet, but they are also able to embed comments sourced from Twitter and from readers, videos and photos from Instagram, Vine, YouTube, and other sources. Each of these different platforms provides particular functions and affordances, and the live blogs help to curate this diversity by using them in extended and cumulative coverage of breaking news.

Individual and group blogs continue to publish new content, whether promotional, lifestyle-related, personal, or political; what the contemporary social media situation has helped to cause, though, is that blogs in general are no longer the sole – or primary – channels for this content. In addition to a blogger's individual, personal profiles, they might also run pages and accounts for their blogs – or related to their topic of interest – on Facebook or Twitter. New blog posts get promoted on these channels, but other content also gets shared here: social media are not merely an additional way of sharing links to posts, but provide opportunities for new audiences and alternative forms of content. Blogs can carry out similar functions to their earlier iterations, but for different rationales – the aggregational approach of live-blogs, for example, is similar to those of filter and link-blogs, but here the reasoning is that the blog provides a centralized space to highlight comments of interest, operating in tandem with associated discussions on social media. Blogs also act as equivalents for columns and opinion pieces on popular websites, although the inclusion of comments and blog post-like features on many articles makes the distinction between what is and what is not a blog more fuzzy: under the structural definition of a blog, based on its common elements, blogging might not seem as common a practice in 2015 as it was in 2005. Yet unconsciously surreptitious blogging takes place everyday: elements introduced or popularized by blogging influence and shape other forms of online communication, such that, even if a Facebook Timeline might not fit the traditional idea of a 'blog', aspects of it still show the traces of advances made by blogging a decade previously.

Conclusion: Blog days are over?

As this overview has shown, blogging in 2014 is very different to blogging in 1997; as with many facets of internet communication, there has been much change over the past decade and a half at cultural, technological, international, political, and economic levels (among others), and each of these has impacted upon the evolution of blogging. From personal

journals to extended analyses of political subjects, economic statistics research, or climate change opinion pieces, from recipe sharing and restaurant reviews, collections of archival images, and tech culture commentary, to make-up tips and promotions, holiday diaries, and music discussions, blogs represent a wealth of subjects and approaches that might share no commonalities beyond being 'blogs'.

The variety within the blogosphere, and the affordances of blogs in, for example, offering a space for extended posts and comments, mean that, while blogging might not have the same visibility or popularity in 2014 as it did in 2005, the practice is not dead. Blogs are 'old' media when it comes to online communication but, just as news and political blogs did not replace journalism (not that it was their aim), Twitter and Facebook have not overthrown the blogosphere. Blogging remains a key practice in multiple contexts. The importance of blogs for activist movements, especially in response to strict media regulations and government control, is in part because of the affordances of the platform, and partly because of security, surveillance, and privacy fears around using popular, centralized social media platforms. Projects like *Global Voices*, too, underline the contribution that blogging can make in non-Western contexts.

If blogs in the early 2000s were used as personal websites (whether topically-focused or documenting an individual's day-to-day life), their adoption for this purpose reflected their key affordances and functionalities they enabled. The ability to post personal, user-generated content at will – whether short or longer-form pieces – without needing extensive technical literacies or infrastructure requirements (if an individual could access the internet and browse the web, they could essentially set up a blog) was inviting to many, allowing them to share their comments on any topic. Social networking sites and social media surpassed blogging in popularity, due to their own connections and functions, building on the appealing aspects of blogging but also centralizing users (and having a more extensive user base) and offering more functions. However, blogging remains an active practice because its own abilities and specializations remain relevant and have not been completely replaced or integrated by social media platforms. Even if other media overshadow blogs in public consciousness, their functions and affordances are still critical – indeed, the historical trajectory of blogging has reached a point where the ubiquity of functions that emerged from blogs, and the established nature of blogs within the mediasphere, mean that blogs are still being created and read, even if they are not recognized or promoted using that label. Given the evolution of blogging over a decade and a half, the term 'blog' might mean something very different in years to come – and it might fall out of favour completely – but blogging's influence will continue to help shape new practices in online communication.

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Bio

Tim Highfield is Vice-Chancellor's Research Fellow in the Digital Media Research Centre at Queensland University of Technology. He is the author of *Social Media and Everyday Politics* (Polity, 2016). His current fellowship project is 'Visual Cultures of Social Media', and his research draws together social media, popular culture, politics, activism, internet cultures, and more. Full details are available at timhighfield.net.