This entry discusses the main characteristics of blogs and bloggers and their coevolution since the start of blogging in the 1990s. Blogs are a kind of website that can be used to present introspective ruminations or an overview of daily events. A blog can serve as an instrument for political mobilization, a journalistic endeavor, an open-ended literary project, or a means for constant exhibition of the self, and in some cases combines more than one of these functions. However, there is little agreement about what features make a blog a blog. Most authors emphasize features such as the frequent publication of content, a reverse chronological order to display blog posts, and archives of previous posts.

Blogs as Technologies

Blogs are technologies in two senses of the term. In the first sense, they are material and cultural artifacts that freeze contingent social relations and processes. That is, blogs are the result of negotiations between actors that shape their material characteristics and the way we interpret their meaning and significance in particular times and places. Looking at blogs in this way highlights their materiality and defines blogs as a medium or a format. Accordingly, it favors an analysis of how bloggers learn to manage the features of blogs technologically and cognitively, and how they incorporate these features into a range of daily activities and situations.

Blogs also can be seen as technologies in the sense of what Michel Foucault would have called "technologies of the self," that is, the practices or techniques that allow individuals to shape their bodies (and selves) in order to achieve a certain state. Seen in this way, blogs are technologies for self-performance; they allow bloggers to build identities not only for their websites but also for themselves. From this perspective, the history of the blog is as much about the medium as it is about its users and the identities they create for themselves through their sites. The self-performance practices that define blogging are not entirely new, and researchers have focused on the relationship between blogs and other practices that predate them, most notably diary writing and content curation.

These two senses of the term *technology* are mutually constitutive: Blogs (as artifacts) shape the practices through which the identities of bloggers emerge (as technologies of the self) as much as these self-performance practices shape what the blog is to bloggers. The identities of both blogs and bloggers thus rest on the mutual articulation of specific techniques of the self and websites with certain material features to support them. These mutually constitutive identities have experienced important transformations since blogs emerged in the mid-1990s.

Early Blogs

The development of blogs began when a group of people, most of them involved in the software, technology, and web development industries in the United States, created websites in the mid-1990s intended to provide others with annotated sequences of content they had discovered on the web. The creators of these websites attributed great importance to the selection of hyperlinks, which they annotated with brief, descriptive comments. The websites were referred to as *filters* of the web, and they were frequently updated to discuss news, trends, and information related to technology, the Internet, and web design. Most of these websites shared a

specific characteristic: The most recent updates were posted on top of previous ones, creating a reverse chronological order.

Those who created these types of websites also created an identity for themselves. For example, they discussed how to refer to themselves as practitioners of what seemed to them a new kind of online activity. Accordingly, they coined notions such as *weblogger*, *blogger*, *pre-surfer*, and *weblogster*. In these definitions, the technologies of blogging (that is, both the practices and the artifact) were associated with a specific type of subject: a sensible, unique individual who could transform his or her personality into meaningful online navigation sequences for readers.

These early definitions of blogs and bloggers changed as software programs designed for managing and displaying these websites became available at the end of the 1990s. The emergence of automated tools made it possible for other communities of web users to develop blogs and thus enact new identities both for themselves and for their websites. A key factor in this process was the launch of Blogger in 1999. Employing tools such as Blogger, web users began using blogs not to filter the web's content but rather to extend the centuries-old practices that have defined diary writing. In this view, the web could help users to manage a certain relation to the self, based on constant introspection and the discussion of daily life events. Blogs thus inherited the creative impulses of several user communities and became a means to enact the subject positions of online diarists. By the turn of the century, this view of blogs and bloggers had become dominant. In the early years of the new millennium, writers and journalists in the technology field typically hailed blogs for their supposed capacity to give a voice to ordinary web users.

Rise of News and Political Blogs

In addition to the availability of software, other factors helped establish novel identities for blogs and bloggers. For example, the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan were two major events that changed the context in which blogging was practiced in the United States. To give an opinion about these events became pressing for people who felt they had no place to go other than the web. This way of using blogs came to be known first as *warblogging* and then as *political blogging*. In this view, the blog was an ideal means to discuss public affairs along with being a way to filter the web and share comments about bloggers' personal lives. This specific use of blogging required rethinking the identities of its practitioners. In this way, the notion of the blogger gained a political valence.

During the early 2000s, accounts in the mainstream media defined bloggers as a new breed of political observers. Inspired by similar ideas, some journalists explored the possibility of using blogs to improve journalism by expanding the agenda of legacy media through alternative information, keeping alive news neglected by news organizations, and establish a more horizontal relationship with readers. In this way, the link between self-performance and new forms of journalistic and political expression became embedded in the technologies of blogging—the artifacts and the practices.

Monetization and Competition

As blogs became a regular feature of news sites and political endeavors, some individuals and organizations considered the possibility that their websites could become a steady source of income. To become full-time bloggers became a driving goal for many bloggers. To this end, they began experimenting with ways to generate an income. For example, some bloggers invited

readers to donate money to their sites. Others implemented advertising models. According to promoters of this approach, blogging would enable individuals with an entrepreneurial attitude to carve out niches and thus make a living online. In this way, it would be possible to exploit the economic value of the time bloggers had spent creating content and sharing their passions on the web. In this process, the blogosphere acquired an explicit definition as a marketplace of attention.

Inspired by this perspective, by the mid-2000s, some entrepreneurs established companies devoted to creating groups or networks of blogs about specialized content. Organizations emerged that combined the cultural force of blogging and the entrepreneurial logic behind many individuals' blogs. Projects to turn blogs into profitable ventures and enterprises, such as Gawker (2003), HuffPost (2005) and Weblogs, Inc. (2003), were outcomes of this larger process. This resulted in an important transformation of the identity of blogs and bloggers, with many blogs engaged in a market-based competition and bloggers defined as entrepreneurs.

Since the mid-2000s, blogging has fragmented and can be understood not as a generic phenomenon but rather as a matter of niches and subcultures, each with its own set of norms of behavior and codes. This conception of blogging and the rise of specific kinds of sub-blogging by the mid-2000s (such as *mommy blogs*, *video blogs*, and *gadget blogs*) can be situated within a context marked by the prevalence of a cultural discourse that compels bloggers to think of themselves as neoliberal entrepreneurs who forge market transactions with others online. In the second half of the 2000s, blogs faced another major threat that further shaped their identity: the emergence of social media platforms that sought to both extend and replace blogging in important ways. Although blogging itself is often characterized as a type of social media, new platforms such as Facebook and Twitter embodied a major challenge for blogs because they were easier to use and did not require a major investment of time and effort. Referring to a slow evolution of blogging in the late 2000s, *The Economist* (2010) asserted: "An empire gives way" (p. 62). Against this backdrop, bloggers worked to redefine the blog's identity within a reconfigured web ecology.

Some have argued for the blog as a kind of website with sufficient specificity, that is, as a website with characteristics that are significantly different from other kinds of sites. In particular, blogs allow for the possibility of sharing lengthy posts in a web ecology that tends to emphasize the opposite. Accordingly, some bloggers argue that the blog can supplement other social media platforms in important ways. For example, limiting the size of a post to stay within a constraint, such as the character limit on Twitter, can hinder self-performance.

A related argument is that, given their specific features, blogs remain valuable because they enable unique conversations within specialized communities of practice and communication with particular segments of the public. This argument invokes a view of bloggers as entrepreneurs establishing market transactions with others to position themselves online. To support this endeavor, a range of commercial strategies (such as advertising, sponsored posts, and others) are used that blur the boundaries between self-expression and self-promotion. Blogging communities with high levels of activity (such as cooking, fashion, and knitting) are typically used as examples to support this argument.

Defining the Identity of Blogs and Bloggers

An increasingly important body of work draws attention to the specific configurations of blogging in international contexts. In many places, the American imaginary described thus far has worked as a point of reference that many bloggers have sought to imitate. More specifically,

bloggers have adapted this model to make sense of local issues. Blogs thus absorbed the identities of previously existing websites in many places. *Localizing* blogs through names that refer to typical expressions, for example, was crucial in their early development in some parts of the world.

In other contexts, bloggers have used their blogs to enact alternative identities for their websites and for themselves. Adrienne Russell and Nabil Echchaibi describe the experiences of bloggers in places such as Australia, China, Italy, Morocco, and Russia and conclude that blogging can be conceptualized in ways different from those represented by the case of the United States.

In a similar manner, Ignacio Siles analyzed the trajectory of blogs in France and showed that bloggers there envisioned them as a means to reinvigorate what they considered to be an intrinsically French inclination for self-performance, originally enacted through websites such as *pages persos* (personal pages) and online diaries. In this way, becoming a blogger was also a way to connect with the country's literary past. In France, bloggers have continuously construed the blog as an opportunity to seize, reveal, and revive self-elaboration practices that have marked the country's history and imaginary.

The identities of blogs and bloggers are mutually defined. In other words, bloggers' identities on the Internet must be thought of as a process of mutual configuration between specific types of artifacts and certain practices for fashioning the self. As the use of blogs to share various types of content on the web has increased, the blogger identity has gained new modes of identification. Present-day characterizations of blogs and bloggers thus incorporate a wide-ranging repertoire of meanings and practices. For example, in recent years, researchers have discussed how blogging is implicated in a larger history of gendered and unpaid work.

See also Facebook; Journalism, History and Economics of; Social Media; Social Networking Site; Twitter

Further Readings

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