

Blogging: An Effective Medium for Communicating and Discussing Latest News amongst Youth of Karachi

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ABSTRACT

In today's digital and fast progressing world where all aspects of life are fast becoming dependent upon technology and telecommunication, it is imperative that the field of journalism too evolves to include such developments. Therefore, digital journalism i.e. communicating along with discussing news and events round the globe through social networking websites, e – papers together with forums, instagram and blogging is gradually becoming the need of the day. The exponential growth in mobile phone users utilizing broadband services (40% in one year from 2012 to 2013 (Global mobile statistics 2013 : Home, 2013)) and internet users (566.4% in 12 years from 2000 to 2012 (World Stats: Internet World Stats, 2013)) is a witness to this need. However, considering the gaining importance of digital journalism in Pakistan, the researcher was faced with a dearth of quality research in this area in Pakistan. A detailed research of all medium and their significance amongst all age groups could not be made the subject of a short research paper as this one. Therefore, this researcher selected the medium of blogging and its effectiveness in the dissipation of news amongst the youth of Karachi to quantify the otherwise visible increase in its usage. Due to the large population size, random sampling was used for the determination of research participants. A questionnaire designed with mainly close- ended questions was circulated among the students of universities and higher education institutes of Karachi. The main focus of the research was to conclude the importance that the youth attach to blogging as the upcoming norm of journalism. Also it was used to deduce whether it is possible that news ranging from current political events to economic upheavals and entertainment may all end up being broken, distributed and discussed through blogs in the future. The data analysis was summed up under the headings of blogs as a means of accurate and effective transmission of news, the types of news that blogs are being used for by youth and the future of blogs.

Keywords: Digital Journalism, blogging, Karachi youth, news, communication

INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, due to the quick advancements in technology and the widespread use of Internet, all aspects of the human life are quickly becoming digital. Emails, social networking sites and forums have made digital interaction for personal and professional reasons extremely simple. Now accessibility to news has also become digital to a great extent thus giving rise to digital journalism.

It is not easy to define digital journalism making it a highly debatable subject. For example, could a person operating his own web log (in short blog) be given press credentials to cover events? Or would a group of students investigates a crime and developing a report uses footage taken from their own digital cameras and covering all angles of the crime be termed as digital journalists? However, to begin we shall term digital journalism to “refer to news and its accompaniments produced through digital media. It is increasingly incorporated into

traditional print and broadcast journalism” (wiseGEEK, 2013). According to Kevin Kavamoto (2003) in his book *Digital Journalism: Emerging Media and the Changing Horizons of Journalism* proposes the definition as “the use of digital technologies to research, produce and deliver (or make accessible) news and information on an increasingly computer – literate audience”.

Digital journalism encompasses e- papers, social networking websites and web blogs. Several of the commercial newspaper agencies around the world having understood the importance of connecting with their target audience through the internet, have made available their dailies in the form of e – papers. Khaleej Times of UAE, New York Times and The Washington Post of USA, Guardian and the Independent of UK, China Daily and Shanghai Daily from China and Daily Jang, The News International and Dawn of Pakistan, all have their online versions available. Newspapers in print can rarely break news anymore as websites report the news before the televisions and newspapers and are therefore, at a disadvantage.

Social networking websites such as facebook, twitter and instagram and Blogs have further impacted the digital journalism scenario as more and more people are becoming connected through them and utilizing them for latest local and international news. Web Blogs referred to blogs or amateur journalism are on the rise. Blog “is a Web page that serves as a publicly accessible personal journal for an individual” (Webopedia, 2013). Blogs are being commonly used by organizations and their employees due to their many advantages including better informed consumer and citizen, development of stronger relationships and brand loyalty with customers, sharing of knowledge within the organization through intranet and used for getting feedback (McGovern, 2004)

In the context of news, the clear advantages offered by blogs include:

- *Pushing the envelope*
They enable an individual reporter of researcher to raise funds through their readers for the conduct of a particular study, research, preparation of report or coverage of an event.
- *Influencing at the edges*
Sentiments and emotions are now being expressed first on the blogosphere before being taken up by the mainstream media. Furthermore, the mainstream media tends to quickly dispose of stories which the audience then takes up on the blogosphere where they are recirculated with new angles, insights and newsworthy revelations.
- *Enhancing reader trust*
Weblogs of news organizations enable them to become more transparent, accessible and answerable to their readers.
- *Repersonalising journalism*
“Blogs could show that newspapers aren’t monolithic corporations but a collaborative team of individuals with varying viewpoints and who have more in common with their readers than they could possibly know from reading their print articles alone.”
- *Fostering community*
They offer an opportunity for the readers to become part of the new. (Lasica, 2003)

Blogging in Pakistan is also on the rise with an increase by 70% in the number of blogs during the period from June 2010 to December 2011 (Shaukat, 2012). People prefer blogs to newspapers because of the availability of multimedia information in the form of videos, links and pictures. Also as compared to television and newspapers blogs are able to provide more

details and coverage on an event. However, there are also those that say the blogs are being over-estimated due to the lack of regulations over individuals and their accountability resulting in inaccurate information being available, deficiency in coherency and maintenance of blogs (McGovern, 2004) resulting in confusion and frustration on the part of reader, no confidentiality and prevalent poverty resulting in not everyone having access to computers and internet (Brown, 2012).

However, being still a new medium of communicating news, it is not clear how important the youth considers blogging to be in the effective transmission of news to the public. The importance that the youth attaches to blogging would define its future in Pakistan as, if not a replacement then at least a competitor to the traditional newspapers and television reporting.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Digital journalism in Pakistan is still in its formative years. Therefore, it goes without saying that the researches pertaining to the different aspect of digital journalism are hardly to be found. Pakistan is way behind the advance nations such as USA and UK in promoting blogging and using it efficiently. The researcher during the initial phase for the review of literature hardly came across any proper research conducted on the subject. Considering the lack of research and statistics available on blogging as a reliable means for distributing news to the mass media, this research shall aim to evaluate the importance that youth attach to blogging for news and bloggers of news. Through this research, the researcher has aimed to resolve the following queries:

1. To what extent do the educated youth of Karachi rely on the blogs for news as compared to other digital mediums and traditional mediums?
2. How reliable, accurate and convenient are the blogs for remaining up to date with the latest occurrences within the country?
3. How reliable, accurate and convenient are the blogs for remaining up to date with the latest international occurrences?
4. What, in the opinion of the youth, are the deficiencies in the blogosphere of Pakistan which is hindering the progress of blogs as news media?

METHODOLOGY

In order to formulate solid conclusions on the research questions raised by this paper, the researcher has decided the best manner to address them would be through quantitative research. The requirement of using this method can be describes in the words of (*Cohen & Manion, 1980*) as being social research that employs empirical methods and empirical statements where the latter is defined as descriptive statement about what “is” the case in the “real world” rather than what “ought” to be the case.

Participants

Participants included 200 university level students belonging to varied fields of Chartered Accountancy, Bachelors in Education, Bachelors in Engineering, MBBS and from 4 different universities and educational institutes of Karachi. Participants were determined through random sampling.

Research Instrument

For the purpose of data collection, the researcher used a questionnaire that was circulated amongst all the participants. The questionnaire was chosen because of its obvious practicality

for collecting large amounts of information from a large number of people in a short time period and in relatively cost effective manner (*University of Surrey*).

The questionnaire followed the closed format due to its pros of being easy and quick to fill in, simple coding, recording, analyzing and reporting which was the need of this researcher. The questionnaire was designed using the Likert Scale for majority of the questions that pertained with the positives and negatives of blogging while certain questions required yes/ no answers like gender, whether or not blogs were used and purposes for which blogs are used by the students. The latter type of questions served to set the base on which the main areas of the research were developed to form a coherent study and analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

A tailor-made questionnaire consisting of 16 items was developed. The items of the questionnaire were drawn from the relevant content field, in consultation with the review of the literature and personal judgment of the researcher. This procedure ensured the content validity of the questionnaire, which was used for data collection.

The popularity of blogs amongst students

Firstly, it's essential to establish the population that reads or writes the blogs to be able to ascertain its current status amongst the university students in Karachi. The research showed that most students do read blogs. However, the percentage of students who write blogs was far less than those who read as shown in the table below:

	Affirmative	Negative
Students who read blogs	92.5% (184 students)	7.5% (16 students)
Students who write blogs	65.5% (131 students)	34.5% (69 students)

Furthermore, the researcher has also identified that mostly female students were interested in writing blogs and regularly wrote them with nearly 71% of them writing on some topic while only 26% of the male students wrote any blog.

Topics which are commonly read about

The most widely read subject was news and current events which was read by nearly 73% at least once or more in a year of all those students who answered in affirmative to reading blogs. This was followed by jokes and humor with 69%, entertainment and showbiz by 62% while medical and health issued and science and technology was tied at 58%. Personal stories and experiences of individuals were read by 50% people. Other areas identified by few students included poetry and religion. A breakdown of the frequency with which students read is shown below:

	Daily	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
News and Current Events	31%	23%	4%	8%	8%	27%
Medical and Health issues	15%	15%	8%	12%	8%	42%
Entertainment and Showbiz	19%	31%	4%	4%	4%	38%
Jokes and Humor	19%	19%	4%	8%	19%	31%
Science and Technology	15%	19%	8%	8%	8%	42%
Personal stories and experiences of individuals	19%	19%	4%	4%	4%	50%

The above statistics clearly show that blogs are considered important for getting information on news and current events as it is the most read subject and also the most frequently read subject by the students.

Topics which are commonly written about

The students who wrote blogs again identified news and current events to be the favorite are for them with nearly 62.5% of them writing on it daily and 12.5% each writing weekly and fortnightly. Students who write blogs are interested mainly in writing on a regular basis i.e. either daily, weekly or at least once in two weeks. Thus blogs do have an importance in the sharing and discussion of news events and are regarded favorably by the university students.

News blogs have become an essential part of today's journalism and have led to us becoming dependent on them

After establishing the use of blogs amongst the students, the researcher then moved onto determine how important students considered them to be.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
19.50%	48.50%	16.50%	10.00%	5.50%

The results showed that an overwhelming majority of the students at 68% showing agreement to the above. This means that at least the youth of today is increasingly considering digital journalism to be playing an important role for the availability of news and considers themselves to be dependent on them.

They are a Good Source for the News and Current Events That Take Place Globally

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
34.62%	26.93%	26.93%	7.69%	3.85%

The students viewed blogs favorably for getting information on global events with 61.54% agreeing with the statement. Some students while they filled questionnaires were interviewed briefly. The reasons they identified for getting global news from blogs was that while the mainstream media brings in important news affecting millions, however, because of their relatives living abroad, the students and their families read international blogs of the different countries to be updated about them. Further research is required to corroborate the link of relatives living abroad with the blogs.

They are a good source for the news and current events that take place in our country

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
51.00%	17.50%	13.50%	7.00%	11.00%

Furthermore, blogs were acknowledged strongly for getting news and current events of the country. This is understandable as the mainstream channels focus only on major events that affect the political and economic situation on a macro level and different channels are repetitive in their news. News pertaining to the rural areas which comprises more than 50% of the population is not given that level of coverage. Blogs are able to bring out news form

the corners of the country as they can be written by anyone. However, to confirm this surmise, further research would be required.

Blogs provide more detailed and accurate news as compared to traditional media (television and newspapers)

Students were divided on their response with 46.79% considering blogs to provide detailed information which is also accurate. Though the remaining students were not strongly against the accuracy and detail provision of blogs, however a significant percentage disagreed.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
14.29%	32.5%	35.72%	0.00%	17.5%

We hear major news and events first from blogs and then from other sources of journalism

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
3.50%	16.00%	54.50%	9.00%	17.00%

Only 19.5% of the students agreed that blogs gave news first. This means that for the latest updates and breaking news, the traditional media is still utilized and retains its significance. The blogs are a long way from being regarded as the first news source.

Blogs Are a Means for Faster Transmission of Important News and Events amongst the General Public

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
31.00%	36.50%	22.00%	2.50%	8.00%

A good majority of 67.5% students agreed to blogs being a quick means of exchanging news and events. This may have to do with the blogs being able to be accessed anytime by students in cities through smart phones. Also links to the various blogs are able to be shared on social websites.

They Provide For Greater Participation of the General Public in Meaningful Discussions on the Current Events

Overwhelming 88% students agreed with the question. The youth enjoy the interactive environment provided on the blogs that enable the readers to immediately convey their feedback on a news articles or start group discussions on them. Such an interface is not available on the mainstream media though many news organizations have started asking for listeners' feedback.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
6.00%	82.00%	4.00%	1.50%	6.50%

Blogs are more effective than mass media for the following type of news

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Political events	20.50%	8.50%	66.50%	2.00%	2.50%
Humanitarian and Human rights issues	41.67%	41.67%	8.34%	0.00%	8.34%
Technological breakthroughs and news	40.50%	49.50%	6.50%	3.50%	0.00%
Economic and business news	29.50%	51.50%	8.50%	1.00%	9.50%
News related to Pakistan	31.00%	26.50%	38.50%	4.00%	0.00%
Global news	1.50%	45.50%	41.00%	2.00%	10.00%

The students considered that humanitarian issues and human rights issues were more effectively communicated transmitted through blogs. In fact more than this, the technological breakthroughs were looked for on blogs. Such events tend to be ignored by the mainstream media which focuses more on the political events and has many journalists discussing each and every angle of any change in the political atmosphere. Thus the students were not in agreement of blogs for political news.

Blogs will replace traditional media i.e. newspapers and televisions in the short term

A mixed approach was visible among the students. However, mostly they disagreed. This shows that blogging has not yet met the expectations of youth in spread and communication of news.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
6.50%	27.00%	26.50%	33.50%	6.50%

Blogs will replace traditional media i.e. newspapers and televisions in the long term

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
0.00%	16.00%	23.50%	14.50%	46.00%

The students were rather indecisive on the role that the blogs would play in the long run. 38% outright disagreed with the idea while nearly half of them said that they didn't know. Considering that blogging is a very new concept in the field of journalism, the confusion is understandable. It may take time before blogging is rationalized and becomes a clear-cut field with vivid regulations and guidelines.

SUMMARY

In the light of the survey, we can rightly say that blogs are very popular among university students. The data analysis shows that more than 90% university students read blogs and more than 50% write as well. The youth usually read current affairs More than 50% of the younger generation has started depending upon blogs for news. Blogs are good source of news both locally and globally. Around 68% respondents believe that blogs provide more detailed and accurate news as compare to the traditional media, i.e. television and newspaper. About 50% of the participants believe that we hear major news and events first from blogs

and then from other sources of journalism. However, only 20% of the respondents believe that blogs are a means for faster transmission of important news and events amongst the general public as compared to traditional media. Blogs were considered to be very effective for humanitarian, human rights issues and technological breakthroughs while students did not consider them to be much worthy for political events. Furthermore, though a fraction of the students considered blogs to be worthy enough to replace the traditional media, however for long term they were mainly indecisive with 46% students declaring that they did not know whether this could occur. This shows that the blogs have yet to go a long way in becoming a reliable and effective means of communication for all new.

RECOMMENDATION

Blogs were only a very limited area of the arena of digital journalism. Research should be conducted on other facets as well.

Furthermore, this research only identified the views of university level students on the importance of blogging for news. More research is required in to the aspects of

1. Identifying the reasons why blogs have gained importance for students.
2. How the increase in social websites, smart phones and other technology is contributing in the rise in digital journalism.
3. The views of other age groups on blogs.
4. The difference in importance and feasibility of digital journalism in rural and urban areas.

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