

Blogs are dead, long live blogging

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2011/03/31/blogs-are-dead-long-live-blogging/

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Blogger?

The classic idea of the blog may have passed, but blogging is alive and well. However, it is in a kind of creative crisis, with the market appearing to assume a longer tail with a steeper curve.

I write this partly in response to the [Orwell Prize](#). I am on record as distrusting all prizes or lists. They are cheap, subjective, attention-seeking devices and in this case, it's worked.*

Of the blogs on the Orwell list some of the subjects are very functional. Others of the chosen few seem to blog rather sporadically. Some of the writing is rather long-winded and unremarkable. Some of the writers don't actually have their

own website but contribute to others. This seems to go against the Classic Blogger idea of a person (in pyjamas) writing pithy personal missives on a regular basis that are better quality, more diverse and exceptionally innovative compared to the Dead Tree press.

That doesn't matter, of course. The rigid idea of rules for blogging was always a contradiction in terms in a new media world where variation is the key to evolution. Look down the Orwell list and I am sure you will find writing to challenge, surprise and delight you. But it does look like a survey of a field that is in transition with much of it feeling rather below par.

There are some good reasons:

1. Twitter has taken a lot of bloggers away from the 'long-form' to the delights of 140 characters
2. There are far more semi-professionals. When I started this blog five years ago I was a lonely innovator. Now every LSE institute or Department has its own blog (and Twitter feed and Facebook page).
3. Mainstream media now blogs. Professional journalists like [Paul Waugh](#) have their own 'proper' blogs but I now think of newspaper columnists like David Aaronovitch as bloggers who straddle Twitter and their professional websites.
4. Practically, people may have got bored with putting all that effort in for little reward.
5. Surplus supply. There is a so much professional and personal comment around on MSM ([Comment Is Free](#)) as well as independent forums like [Mumsnet](#) or Facebook that opinion is now so cheap (free) that it's lost its value in the market place of public debate. New ideas and new facts suddenly have more currency than views.
6. The market has settled down. In politics, [Guido Fawkes](#) is dominant with Labour List and Conservative Home taking up much of the semi-official space. MSM has elbowed it's way back in with blogs like Cathy Newman's Channel 4 News FactCheck
7. Everyone's at it. The market's gone way down the long tail with very specialist blogs (reflected in some of the health blogs on the Orwell List) where people are addressing a very niche audience (though I wouldn't be surprised if some of those narrow subject niches are rather capacious in terms of readers)

I haven't got a way of putting the figures to this thesis, to quantify what exactly is going on. If you have the statistics

or can think of a way of measuring it, I would be interested to hear.

As I said, this is not to complain or warn. I think it's just a sign of the continuing rapid change in the way journalism is created. It took a while for the Orwell Prize people to accept that [blogging was a valid form of writing for their lofty ideals](#). Now they've embraced it, the form is shifting again.

In the States I am amazed that there is a still [a debate about bloggers v journalists](#). In the UK we appear to have moved on from that rather sterile argument, although our blogosphere does not have the power of the American versions.

One newer type of blogging that really excites me is live-blogging. This can be done brilliantly on Twitter – often by groups such as UKuncut during an event – but also by professionals like Andrew Carvin at NPR, as well as in longer multi-dimensional form by individuals or teams at the BBC, Al Jazeera, Reuters and the Guardian. Our [Value of Networked Journalism report](#) last year suggested the Live Blog could become The New Front Page for online news.

International blogging is also now part of the fabric of how we understand global events. I have gained huge insight into the so-called Arab Spring through individual bloggers in the region as well as via aggregators like Global Voices. Much of that citizen reporting also finds its way into mainstream media.

So while the classic idea of the individual citizen blog in the UK may be a little under the weather, the idea of blogging still has a bright, networked future.

*Of course, if you are looking to put me in the top ten of a list, or give POLIS a few hundred thousand bucks to set up a new prize, then the above statement will be edited to read the following:

“Journalism lists and prizes are an excellent way of rewarding innovation and quality and a great way to stimulate debate about the role of innovation and excellence in contemporary news media”.

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