RESEARCH ARTICLE

ROLE OF BLOGGING IN PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Blogs have become an integral part of online culture. They have grown into a massive communication tool used by everyone. Any person from the public can play an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating information on a blog. It is participatory in nature because of user comments attached to news stories. The study which was descriptive in nature dilated upon role of blogging and its contribution to participatory communication. Blogging allows the masses to be a part of the large communication system. Blogging is still an evolving phenomenon in our country. The use of blogs is steadily on the rise and will be rising to an effective medium in coming years. Critics scoff at the idea of this kind of untrained journalism, while positivist sees them only as teething trouble. Hence, one can conclude that despite being a nascent genre, bogging is here to stay.

INTRODUCTION

Blogging has come a long way since it first began many years ago. Whilst the activity has somewhat evolved over the years with the advances in internet technology, more and more people are turning to blogging not just so that they can get to share the things they love the most with their friends and families, but also because getting into blogging can be a very profitable business venture. Blogs have become an integral part of online culture. It has grown into a massive communication tool used by everyone. And it's only in the past five to ten years that blogging has really taken off and become an important part of the online landscape. The origin of blogging goes further back than the Internet to the days of personal diaries, chronicles and other written forms of personal musings. Today, a blog is considered to be a Web page that serves as a publicly accessible personal journal for an individual or company. Online media, such as discussion forums and e-mail lists are also considered to be predecessors to the blog.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research methodology adopted for the study entitled "Role of Blogging in Participatory Communication: A Descriptive Study" was so designed that correct data could be collected, analyzed and get valid conclusions. The study involves research on online available data, facts and figures. Data collected was secondary in nature and was taken from the internet. The study being descriptive in nature, it did not involve any specific sampling techniques. Different websites were examined to

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understand and retrieve material which dealt with ethical concerns in blogging. Data from every site was studied without any prejudice and hence interpretation was done. Since the data collected for the study was secondary in nature and, moreover, it is a descriptive study, tables and graph were not made. Instead, the qualitative aspect of the content was taken into consideration.

RESULTS

The Word 'Weblog'

The Blog Herald cites the origins of the term weblog to G. Raikundalia & M. Rees, two lecturers from Bond University on the Gold Coast. The term was first used in a paper titled "Exploiting the World-Wide Web for Electronic Meeting Document Analysis and Management". Popular use of the term Weblog as we know it today is from Jorn Barger of the Weblog Robot Wisdom in December 1997. Barger coined the term weblog meaning logging the Web. In 1999 programmer Peter Merholz shortened the term weblog to blog. (Riley, 2005).

Participatory Communication: the concept

The concept of participatory journalism also known as 'public', 'citizen', 'democratic', 'guerrilla' or 'street' journalism is based upon public citizens playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information. It has put democracy back in people's hands. An army of individuals with mobile phones, portable cameras, and blogs is rapidly replacing traditional media as a reliable and wide-ranging source of information. Unfortunately, popular belief has it that news coming from official, mainstream

channels is superior in quality and reliability than news reported by a blogger or someone with a shaky camcorder. Traditional media keep being preached as the source of truth, but what they lack is exactly the essence of truth: validation. Mainstream media have a one-way dialogue with their audience: there's no way to check back what was told or written. Participatory journalism, on the contrary, finds its very strength in the continuous, ongoing validation process operated by a large community. This is why it is also called Participatory Journalism. The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires.

Evolution

The dominant paradigm of development underwent far-reaching interrogation and criticism in the 1970s by scholars and practitioners across disciplines and from around the globe. Perhaps the most significant challenge to the dominant paradigm of development communication came from Latin American scholars who deconstructed and rejected the premises, objectives, and methods of modernization and its attendant communication approaches. This early criticism stimulated a range of research projects that has resulted in a robust literature exploring participatory communication approaches to development. Participatory approaches gained momentum in the 1980s and 1990s and have evolved into a rich field standing in stark contrast to models and theories of the first development decades. In fact, scholars have noted that few contemporary development projects—regardless of theoretical orientation—are conducted without some sort of participatory component, even if this notion is honored more on paper than in practice. Despite its widespread use, however, the concept of participatory communication is subject to loose interpretation that appears at best to be variable and contested and at worst misused and distorted. Indeed, the Latin American challenge for scholars to embrace more appropriate, ethical, and responsive theories of development communication remains unrealized to some extent, creating a sense of conceptual and practical stagnation. (Huesca, 2002)

Communication Domination

Prior to the 1970s, almost all of Latin American communication development theory and practice was based on concepts and models imported from the United States and Europe and used in ways that were both incommensurable with and detrimental to the region's social context. These concepts and models were guided philosophically by a combination of behaviorism and functionalism prevalent in the social sciences and by persuasion definitions of communication dating back to Aristotle in the humanities. The development programs and research projects falling out of this philosophical frame tended to focus on individual attitudes and effects, while ignoring social, political, and economic structures that frequently stood in contradiction to development goals. Development was often defined in terms of the adoption of new behaviors or technologies, although this history draws primarily from Latin American authors, it should be noted that the dominant paradigm of development received criticisms across geographic boundaries. Flaws in the conceptualization and administration of diffusion of innovations projects, for example, were identified in both Africa and Asia, which were rarely, if ever, examined in terms of their social, political, and economic dimensions, and hence concluded, 'the classic diffusion model was based on an ideological framework that contradicts the reality of this region'. This persuasion, attitude focus of research not only reflected the culture and philosophy of the Western tradition, it resulted in theories that blamed individuals, not systems, for continued underdevelopment. But more than merely reflecting the intellectual and cultural history of Western research, early development projects were criticized as a form of domination and manipulation. The vertical structure of many extension projects paralleled the hierarchical organization of landlord-peasant relations preceding it in Latin American latifundios, resulting in an unintended continuity of inegalitarian relations. The sense that development projects frequently perpetuated the interests of dominant elites was echoed by numerous scholars at the "First Latin American Seminar on Participatory Communication" sponsored in 1978 by Ciespal (Center for Advanced Studies and Research for Latin America). Influenced by dependency theory that was prevalent at the time, scholars there concluded that uses of mass media in development imposed the interests of dominant classes on the majority of marginalized people, resulting in the reinforcement, reproduction, and legitimation of social and material relations of production. (Huesca, 2002)

The Latin American critique of the dominant paradigm, then, moved from the level of specific and misguided models of communication to the level of historical and global theories of domination and inequity. Early on, Latin American scholars suggested that development communication be interpreted from within a global framework guided by dependency theory. That is, development projects should be analyzed as integral elements in a global system that actually act to maintain asymmetrical relations. Freire went as far as to label the various top-down, modernization projects as "assistentialism," or social and financial activities that attack symptoms, not causes, of social ills that function as disguised forms of colonial domination. These early suspicions have been confirmed by a more recent analysis of health and nutrition programs in Latin America, which concluded that development projects functioned as an extension of the geopolitical struggle between the capitalist West and the communist East. Moreover, the categories of assistance constructed by donor nations allowed "institutions to distribute socially individuals and populations, in ways consistent with the creation and reproduction of modern capitalist relations". The deconstruction of the dominant paradigm of development, then, was a protest against the perpetuation of historical inequities and a 2 Dependency was school of thought emerging in Latin America in the 1960s that explained underdevelopment as the result or byproduct of capitalist expansion. Furthermore, the development of underdevelopment was interpreted as part of a process of continuous political economic relations occurring globally between the developed north and the impoverished south, or what has been termed "coreperiphery" relations. Key authors Cardoso &Faletto (1979) and Frank (1967). call for the invention of humane, egalitarian, and responsive communication theories and practices Embracing the notion of praxis—self-reflexive, theoretically guided practice—was an immediate and obvious outcome of the Latin American critique of the dominant paradigm. The modernization project and its

concomitant theories of development themselves had been shown to illustrate the inextricable connection between theory and practice. Through its assumptions regarding the locus of social problems, models of communication as information transfer, methods that placed human objects under the antiseptic gaze of scientists, and findings that confirmed micro explanations of persistent underdevelopment, the modernization approach unconsciously demonstrated the reciprocal and self-confirming relationship between theory and practice. One of the earliest recommendations of the Latin American critics was to acknowledge consciously this relationship, to turn away from scientific positions of objectivity, and to embrace an orientation toward research as praxis. Much of the inspiration for this shift came from the work of Freire, whose experience in traditional pedagogy was seen as analogous to modernization approaches to development. Freire denounced this objectivist orientation as sadistic and oppressive, and claimed that humane practitioners could not view themselves as proprietors of knowledge and wisdom. In contrast to this oppressive pedagogy, Freire proposed a liberating approach that centered on praxis. Under this orientation, practitioners attempt to close the distance between teacher and student, development agent and client, researcher and researched in order to enter into a co-learning relationship guided by action and reflection. In a praxis approach to teaching, development, or research, people serve as their own examples in the struggle for and conquest of improved life chances.

The turn toward research praxis was a radical epistemological move that has been adopted and refined by scholars since then. It posits that the combination of critical theory, situation analysis, and action create a fruitful dialectic for the construction of knowledge, which is systematically examined, altered, and expanded in practice. The elimination of the dichotomy between subject and object, combined with an action-reflection orientation toward inquiry resulted in a heightened moral awareness. This liberating praxis generated thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. The turn toward praxis not only rejected dominant approaches to development as oppressive, it argued for integrating scholarship more directly with development practice. While this turn provided both a philosophical and epistemological framework for scholarship, it also provided a practical, commensurate method in the form of dialogue. Dialogic communication was held in stark contrast to information transmission models emerging from Lasswell's 5-point question of who says what in what channel to whom with what effect. This required development researchers and practitioners to seek out the experiences, understandings, and aspirations of others to jointly construct reality and formulate actions. Freire provided concrete exercises for initiating critical dialogues to, in effect, deconstruct social contexts, separate out their constituent parts, and reconstruct a thematic universe for pursuing social transformation. Such a process resulted in a 'cultural synthesis' between development collaborators to arrive at mutually identified problems, needs and guidelines for action. Aside from its practical contribution, dialogue was promoted as an ethical communication choice within the development context. Freire (1970) argued that true humanization emerged from one's ability 'to name the world'

in dialogic encounters. This humanization was not only denied to marginalized or oppressed peoples, but something that leaders and elites were prevented from attaining, as well, in prevailing communication environments. Grounded in Buber's notion of "I-Thou" communication, he argued that subject-object distinctions were impossible to maintain in true dialogue because one's sense of self and the world is elicited in interaction with others. The resulting fusion of identities and communal naming of the world did not emerge merely from an exchange of information; however, it required a moral commitment among dialogue partners. 'Being dialogic is not invading, not manipulating, not imposing orders. Being dialogic is pledging oneself to the constant transformation of reality'. This highly developed sense of dialogue—simultaneously practical and rarefied—pushed scholars to conceptualize the phenomena of their study away from states and entities toward process. (Huesca, 2002) A defining characteristic of participatory journalism is conversation. However, there is no central news organization controlling the exchange of information. Conversation is the mechanism that turns the tables on the traditional roles of journalism and creates a dynamic, egalitarian give-and-take ethic. The fluidity of this approach puts more emphasis on the publishing of information rather than the filtering. Conversations happen in the community for all to see. In contrast, traditional news organizations are set up to filter information before they publish it. It might be collaborative among the editors and reporters, but the debates are not open to public scrutiny or involvement.

"In an era when anyone can be a reporter or commentator on the Web, 'one move to a two-way journalism'. The journalist becomes a 'forum leader', or a mediator rather than simply a teacher or lecturer. The audience becomes not consumers, but 'pro-sumers,' a hybrid of consumer and producer". But participatory journalism does not show evidence of needing a classically trained 'journalist' to be the mediator or facilitator. Plenty of weblogs, forums and online communities appear to function effectively without one.

The new interactive medium both threatens the status quo and promises an exciting new way of learning about the world. This deftly describes both camps of opinion concerning participation by the audience in journalism. Each time there has been a period of significant, social, economic and technological change, a transformation in news occurred. This happened in the 1830s-40s with the advent of the telegraph; the 1880s with a drop in paper prices and a wave of immigration; the 1920s with radio and the rise of gossip and celebrity culture; the 1950s at the onset of the Cold War and television. The arrival of cable, followed by the Internet and mobile technologies, has brought the latest upheaval in news. And this time, the change in news may be even more dramatic. (Huesca, 2002)

Participatory Communication and New Media

The term participatory media is commonly used for new media and it is often equated with platforms like community media, blogs, wikis, RSS, tagging and social bookmarking, music-photo-video sharing, mashups, podcasts, participatory video projects and videoblogs. All together they can be described as 'e-services, which involve end-users as active participants in the value creation process'. Traditional media outlets have functioned as the gatekeepers of information for society as described through the dominant paradigm for mass

communication theory. It follows a one-to-many communication model where one producer attempts to reach as many readers or viewers as possible considering the audience as passive consumers of information. Technologically, there are now more possibilities for a dynamic citizenship and ideally, new media can assist consensus-finding processes that augment open and free public discourse. The claims of the internet about its benefits over traditional media are ample: providing far more interactive opportunities, enhancing participation of audiences, providing new ways of organizing forums for discussion and debate, being a technology for the enhancement of democracy and providing far more information at a greater speed and scale (Thapar, 2013) Online newspapers, like other online media, have the potential to be interactive and more so than their traditional counterparts. This ultimately provides them with the potential to foster participation and uphold the ideals of public journalism, the public sphere and democracy. Properly approached, public journalism is about challenging people to interact with journalists and with each other as concerned citizens. This approach assumes that there is a connection between the state of democracy and interactive communications stimulated by media organizations. While citizens can discuss public matters with their family, friends, colleagues and with members of associations that they have joined, they have relatively few chances to access public forums and to interact with journalists and with strangers who read the same newspaper or follow the same news magazine. (Thapar, 2013)

DISCUSSION

Contribution of Blogs to Participatory Communication

Among the newest forms of participatory journalism to gain popularity is the weblog. A weblog is a web page made up of usually short, frequently updated text blocks or entries that are arranged in reverse chronological order (most recent to oldest). The content and purpose of weblogs vary greatly, ranging from personal diary to journalistic community news to collaborative discussion groups in a corporate setting. Weblogs can provide links and commentary about content on other Web sites. They can be a form of 'latest news' page. Or they can consist of project diaries, photos, poetry, mini-essays, project updates, even fiction. The quick, short posts on weblogs have been likened to 'instant messages to the Web'. On other weblogs, the content can be longer, such as excerpts from a research paper in progress, with the author seeking comment from peers. These personal publishing systems have given rise to a phenomenon that shows the markings of a revolution - giving anyone with the right talent and energy the ability to be heard far and wide on the Web. Weblogs fall into the one-to-many (individual blogs) or many-to-many (group blogs) model of media, with some allowing no or little discussion by users and others generating robust reader responses. Either way, weblogs inevitably become part of what is now called the 'blogosphere'. This is the name given to the intercast of weblogs — the linking to and discussion of what others have written or linked to, in essence a distributed discussion. The growth of weblogs has been largely fueled by greater access to bandwidth and low-cost, often free software. These simple easy-to-use tools have enabled new kinds of collaboration unrestricted by time or geography. The result is an advance of new social patterns and means for self-expression.

Blog-like communities like Slashdot.org have allowed a multitude of voices to participate while managing a social order and providing a useful filter on discussion. Weblogs have expanded their influence by attracting larger circles of readers while at the same time appealing to more targeted audiences. Weblogs are a powerful draw in that they enable the individual participant to play multiple roles simultaneously – publisher, commentator, moderator, writer, documentarian. Weblogs have also proven to be effective collaborative communication tools. They help small groups (and in a few cases, large) communicate in a way that is simpler and easier to follow than email lists or discussion forums. Nieman Reports 'Blogs are in some ways a new form of journalism, open to anyone who can establish and maintain a Web site, and they have exploded in the past year'. Walter Mossberg wrote in his Wall Street Journal technology column. 'The good thing about them is that they introduce fresh voices into the national discourse on various topics, and help build communities of interest through their collections of links'. Mossberg's description of Weblogs as a new kind of journalism might trouble hidebound journalists. But it is a journalism of a different sort, one not tightly confined by the profession's traditions and values. Mainstream news operations are businesses supported by advertising. As hierarchical organizations, they value smooth production workflows, profitability and rigorous editorial standards. Weblogs adhere to a different set of values. Bloggers value informal conversation, egalitarianism, subjective points of view and colorful writing over profits, central control, objectivity and filtered prose.

Blurring with the mass media

There are talks that blogging is blurring with journalism or blogging definitely has citizen journalistic element in it and so on. The debate comprises many complex issues like what journalism exactly is. Citizen journalism is the concept of members of the public playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating the news and information. Though, there are some differences in blogging and journalism, with blogging not having a concept of gatekeeping, which is of great importance in journalism. Still blogging is said to be blurred with mass media for two reasons: firstly many bloggers are performing the function of reporting the events. Huge numbers of bloggers are contributing to the content on many social issues and in certain cases, where media fails to reach, or does not give coverage to a certain incident, bloggers are playing a great role in bringing about the real story in front of public. The examples of this could be seen from the IIPM case, the Khairlanji case, the case of IAS officer Shanmugam's murder in Bihar, and the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks. The issue usually gets dealt with it is discussed on blogosphere. And, hence it is said that more and more journalistic motives are at play with respect to blog.

Secondly, the medium is a free one. It allows the masses to be a part of the large communication system. The practice of gatekeeping is nonexistent and probably there are no ideological or other restrictions on content, the free press is really used by the masses- giving it a status of mass media. The mainstream media is also taking a notice of blogging in a big way. Though in India, blogging is still in its nascent stage and cannot replace journalism, prominent media houses have started looking towards blogging in a friendly way.

Pune's English tabloid daily started a column named 'bloggers park' and writes about what is happening in blogosphere at large. Many bloggers, particularly those engaged in participatory journalism, differentiate themselves from the mainstream media, while others are members of that media working through a different channel. Some institutions see blogging as a means of 'getting around the filter' and pushing messages directly to the public. Some critics worry that bloggers respect neither copyright nor the role of the mass media in presenting society with credible news. Bloggers and other contributors to user-generated content are behind Time magazine naming their 2006 person of the year as 'You'. Of course, the medium of blogs is yet to progress to be truly called as mass media. How-so-ever blogs might operate on a principle of free press, the reach of the medium is severely limited. In cases of blogs, the access to the medium is heavily dependent on internet access. Until and unless there is widespread net penetration and net literacy, blogs could never be the mass media of course. However, the use of blogs is steadily on the rise and will be rising to an effective medium in coming years.

The Indian Perspective

Indian blogosphere is used to describe the online predominantly community of Indian weblogs that is part of the larger blogosphere. With the advent of unicode when typing in Indian languages on computer became possible, blogs in Indian languages started to be written. Initially due to non-availability of Indic typing tools or due to non-awareness of such tools Indian blogosphere was small. Later on, due to spread of awareness in this regard and due to development and availability of Indic typing tools, number of Indian blogs started growing rapidly. The Indian blogging industry has gone beyond the Google Cash Cow's and evolved as a strong publishable medium, with the number of professional tech bloggers, personal bloggers and business bloggers on the rise.
The unwieldy and awkward word grew from being an exclusive preserve of the tech savvy to become the dominant face of the Internet. It became Merriam-Webster's word of the year in 2004. It spawned an entire subset of language to explain itself. The 133 million "netizens" of its "blogosphere" rang alarm bells in mainstream media organizations, and it was arguably responsible for the millionth word in English.

In India, the blog has grown steadily, if unspectacularly, from a handful at the dawn of the country's Internet era in the early 2000s to an estimated 3.2 million, according to JuxtConsult's India Online 2008 report. JuxtConsult is a Delhi-based market research firm. The exact number of active Indian blogs, however, is hard to pin down, and the size of the Indian blogosphere could be between 200,000 and half a million active blogs today. Technorati, a search engine for blogs, in its annual State of the Blogosphere report indexes 133 million blogs worldwide since 2002. The 11 September attack in 2001, and the 2003 Iraq war saw the emergence of a large number of personal and political blogs. In 2004, the first year Technorati published its report, it tracked four million blogs. By October 2005, that number had risen to 19.6 million. But in Indian blogging, there were no such tipping points. Indian blogs have always grown organically, steadily through word of mouth. There have, however, been sporadic incidents that made existing bloggers the centre of attention. In the wake of a telecommunications breakdown following the 2004 tsunami,

the South-East Asia Earthquake and Tsunami blog (SEA-EAT) published text messages sent from affected areas by the people on the ground, enabling bloggers to provide useful information from around the region. The now defunct SEA-EAT blog became one of the world's top ranked blogs—at one point more popular than the BBC website—in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami. 'It evolved slowly but there were a few watershed moments like the whole IIPM brouhaha (when, in 2005, the Indian Insitute of Planning and Management sent legal notices to bloggers who'd featured a story on the institute), the Blog Quake Day (when, after the Pakistan earthquake in 2005, nearly 100-125 bloggers pooled in money to donate to relief funds) and regular events that result in collective anger among bloggers. The Indian blogosphere's growth has also been stymied by technical factors: low internet penetration, estimated at 60 million people, or 5.22% of the total population, and the only recent arrival of regional language blogging. As a result, it remains a small, urban-centric, niche community. 'A blog with a daily readership of 1,500-2,000 would be considered fairly successful in India; in the US, in contrast, the superstars measure their readership in hundreds of thousands. Blogospheres have always been scattered, disorganized communities, and in the statistical bell curve of blog popularity, at least 90% are confined to the infinite recesses of Internet obscurity. But blogs in countries such as the US are organized on subject lines, with a cluster of popular and influential blogs acting like hubs. From cooking advice to Buffy the Vampire Slayer fandom, there are blogs and hubs for every occasion and purpose.

2009 is considered as the year of blogging. Three incidents mark 2009 and it is all set to become a year of blogging in India. It first started with ChetanyeKunte and the Mumbai blasts. It marked the way blogs has gained prominence at a broader level when NDTV took it seriously. During the Mumbai Terror attacks, a blog started by Dina Mehta was perhaps the first place to provide useful links and phone numbers. During the unprecedented Bihar Floods in August 2008, a blog was the first site providing useful information. During the Tsunami in December 2004, another blog came to the rescue. Next up in the chain is the fake IPL player blog, this is remarkable turning point in blogging history of India. Fake IPL Player gave the first taste of blogging to many Indians. 3rd and most recent is the blogger who helped to solve a case between TVS and Bajaj over a patent case. The judge actually referred to the content in the Spicy IP blog to arrive at the judgement.

Acknowledgment

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