

# How can we measure the influence of the blogosphere?

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## ABSTRACT

This paper reviews ways to measure the influence of the blogosphere on public opinion and mass media. It covers anecdotes of stories becoming big in the blogosphere and then being (re)introduced into mass media. It reports on the traffic blogs receive and their integration into political and news sites. It also compares the relative ranking of blogs on websites like BlogStreet and Technorati.

**KEYWORDS:** Blogs, blogosphere, communications, influence, mass media, public opinion.

## INTRODUCTION

As the World Wide Web approaches its teens, we have new expectations about both the right to express an opinion and access to information upon which to base that opinion. Blogs have played a role in raising those expectations; thus, blogs have demonstrated influence: the power to affect events. This paper will position blogging in the context of participatory journalism; show that mainstream media and political party response to the new technology are reflections of its emerging influence; and illustrate the power of blogs to affect the news agenda. In addition, the paper will review four automated systems designed to assess influence.

### 1.1 The blogging phenomena in context

In the early 1990s, the Web promised active communities and social networks, sharing ideas and shaping new realities. Everyone who wished to be would be a publisher; democratization of information (and, consequently, power) would follow. Indeed, the growth of the Web was nothing short of phenomenal. In November 1990, there was one Web host (CERN); in 1994, the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives added Web servers; and, by 1998, there were

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about 300 million Web pages, and Network Solutions registered its 2 millionth domain.<sup>1</sup>

Personal publishing got a boost with the advent of GeoCities, which eliminated the need to know HTML or understand FTP. Much as they did in the early days of Aldus Pagemaker, novice writers and designers enthusiastically embraced the new technology, creating communications that made classically educated communicators and designers shudder; they then ceased up-dating the sites when the newness faded. When Yahoo! Purchased GeoCities in 1999, it hosted 3.5 million individual Web sites.<sup>2</sup>

By 1998, there were a handful of sites that we would identify today as blogs. In 1999, the Poynter Institute hired Jim Romanesko to produce the “MediaNews” blog; by 2002, analysts estimated the universe at 500,000 blogs. [1, 9] Perseus estimates today’s universe at 5 million blogs.<sup>3</sup> Recent Pew Internet and American Life research suggests that 11 percent of American Net users have read blogs and 2-7 percent have created them; this translates to between 2.4 and 8.4 million bloggers. Net users with a college degree are the most likely bloggers. [17]

Primary characteristics of a blog include:

- Reverse chronological journaling (format)
- Regular, date-stamped entries (timeliness)
- Links to related news articles, documents, blog entries within each entry (attribution)
- Archived entries (old content remains accessible)
- Links to related blogs (blogrolling)
- RSS or XML feed (ease of syndication)
- Passion (voice)

The act of updating a blog (adding an entry) is called “blogging;” someone who writes a blog is a “blogger.” The

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<sup>1</sup> Hobbes' Internet Timeline v7.0,

<http://www.zakon.org/robert/internet/timeline/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Weblogs: a history and perspective,” *Rebecca's Pocket*, Sept. 7, 2000, [http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog\\_history.html](http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html).

<sup>3</sup> Perseus Blogsurvey, <http://www.perseus.com/blogsurvey/>.

name has been shortened from the original descriptor, “Web log.” Blogs differ from the GeoCities-type Web sites in format; most also differ in frequency of updates and the use of attribution, which is a characteristic of traditional journalism. The external links (blogroll) are integrated into the page design; they are not the content nor are they a separate “page of links” as is often the case with personal Web sites. Blogs are sometimes characterized by their technology, often a personal content management system such as Blogger, Greymatter, LiveJournal, Manila, Movable Type, or UserLand. Blogging has become so ubiquitous that AOL implemented a version in 2003. Nokia announced in March 2004 that it was adding LifeBlog to its phones. [20]

### 1.2 Varied Topics and Audiences

Bloggers write about topics that matter to them; their audience may be large or small. Some blogs are single-person operations (one to many); others have a community of authors (many to many). They foster community and conversation by allowing readers to comment on postings, thus becoming an author in turn, or by providing an e-mail address to dialog directly with the blogger. Each of these concepts was novel when introduced; mainstream media have moved along this path of two-way communication, but they have done so slowly and incompletely.

Topics are as varied as the humans who blog. In one of the first mainstream media features on blogging in 2000, *New Yorker* author Rebecca Mead explores the varied blog culture: she learns about a ladies-only bus in Bangkok and undergoes a burrito personality analysis; she also delves into the roots of Blogger, exploring the love life of a principal in the process. [14]

The events of September 11, 2001 led to a remarkable growth in blogs – both political and personal commentary – and created a phenomenon known as *war blogs*. This began a shift in the dominant blog genre from Web design and technology to politics. In February 2002, Google bought Blogger, elevating the significance of both the technology and its potential in disintermediation, specifically the democratization of political discourse. Although all blogs are not political commentary, it is their influence – exemplified by “InstaPundit’s” 100,000 readers per day (equivalent to a medium-sized city daily newspaper or cable news show) – that caught the eye of mainstream media. [22]

As U.S. and British forces entered Iraq in March 2003, blogs achieved an expanded, worldwide focus. Working journalists, soldiers, and citizens in Iraq and around the world – voices that before now had not been heard in real time during times of war – took center stage in this new environment, and there was a consequence:

“The roles that journalism [the press] assigned to itself in the mid-nineteenth century, on the strength of its newly acquired professionalism, as gatekeeper, agenda-setter and news filter, are all placed at risk when its

primary sources become readily available to its audiences.” [7]

### 1.3 Blogging as Journalism

Journalism is not a medium; it is not newspapers or magazines or TV – those entities embody something known as The Press. Instead, journalism is, in the words of James W. Carey, “our day book, our collective diary, which records our common life. That which goes unrecorded goes unpreserved except in the vanishing moment of our individual lives. The creation and preservation of collective memory, whether practiced heroically and clandestinely in Kundera’s Czechoslovakia, or openly and freely in New York” is the practice of journalism. It can be practiced “virtually anywhere and under almost any circumstances... To make experience memorable so it won’t be lost and forgotten is the task of journalism.” [3]

Participatory journalism is a concept that embraces an expanded two-way communication between established media and readers, allowing readers to interact with journalists and news organizations. Today’s practice of blogging embodies these concepts of journalism. Not only does it provide many viewpoints on shared experiences, but it often also serves as a collective databank used to jog the faulty memories of those who write or report for major media. It is the latest in a series of technologies that have changed the face of both mass communication and social networks.

## 2. EFFECT ON MASS MEDIA AND POLITICS

Mass communication and its institutions have been buffeted by technological change since Gutenberg revolutionized printing in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. Those institutions survived the advent of the telegraph, a new technology that was speedier than the one it replaced, by adopting and adapting. Newspapers joined forces and developed wire services like the Associated Press (AP). In addition, the inverted pyramid style of news writing, which places important news first, followed by less critical details, evolved because of the threat that a telegraph transmission might be cut short. [21]

The information age brought us radio and TV; satellites and computers; Web sites and mobile telephony. Mass media are ubiquitous, and the production and distribution processes that support their infrastructure are capital- and labor-intensive; an economist would note that these are significant barriers to entry. In fact, one of the cost-cutting strategies, the pooling of resources—such as AP, United Press International, and the shared video feed, has contributed to a homogenization of news. That very sameness, some might say blandness, is the antithesis of blogging.

Unlike newspapers or television news, blogging is not capital-intensive; there is no centralized registry, no editorial oversight. All a writer needs is access to a

computer (free at public libraries). The only cost is time, as some hosting services are free. Once again referencing “InstaPundit”: Glenn Reynolds, a University of Tennessee law professor, has created what is arguably the most visited blog in the world. His reach, his influence, is several orders of magnitude greater than his costs, whether measured as time or hosting fees. In a word, he is influential.

Reynolds’ influence depends upon the distributed network that underlies the Internet. The network removes a major impediment to developing and maintaining social networks: geography. In turn, these social networks support participatory journalism – journalism that relies upon two-way communication, such as e-mail, chat, message boards or blogs. The distributed nature of the Net also facilitates blogging technologies such as the TrackBack feature and RSS syndication.

Some analysts suggest that blogs are poised to be the next generation opinion/editorial page. Bloggers already carry out the role of grassroots reporter and fact-checker. Just as print journalism feeds the TV news crews, grassroots bloggers are positioned to feed mainstream print media – what’s new, what’s hot, what’s the buzz. But this relationship is circular; after the print reporter wraps the story and it hits the Web, it’s time for the bloggers to check out the facts, the spin. It’s a system, an ecosystem. [18]

### 2.1 The Tipping Point: 2002

In early 2002, mainstream media began reporting on the blogging phenomena. *Wired* reported that National Public Radio (NPR) had devoted three minutes to how blogging was transforming journalism. It suggested that the NPR coverage meant that blogs were no longer trendy and had, perhaps, passed a sociological tipping point. [12]

However some media had been experimenting with this new dialog for several years. For example, the *Charlotte Observer* used a blog format to report on Hurricane Bonnie in August 1998; “Dispatches from the Coast” is the first known use of blog to cover a breaking news story.<sup>4</sup> Dan Gillmor of the San Jose Mercury News is a veteran technology columnist; he began blogging in January 2000.<sup>5</sup> The *Wall Street Journal* was also a pioneer, launching a blog-like feature in 2000 called “The Best of the Web.”<sup>6</sup>

In the wake of heightened media attention, both *Salon* and Fox News added blogs in February 2002. Professionally written blogs now appear at *MSNBC*, *Slate*, the *Washington Post*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Seattle Times* – almost anywhere Big Media produces online news. In addition, media have enticed bloggers to transition from amateur to professional. For example, Mickey Kaus, who inspired Marshall to start his blog, now writes for MSN’s

*Slate*. Effective March 2004, “CalPundit” Kevin Drum is *Washington Monthly*’s “Political Animal.”

The Media Center at the American Press Institute maintains a directory of more than 300 journalist blogs, those published by news sites as well as those published independently.<sup>7</sup> The Center also publishes “The Weblog Blog,” which focuses on journalist blogs and participatory journalism. However, there is no systematic assessment of which media outlets have implemented blogs, and some view these professional blogs with suspicion, believing that the only true blogs are grassroots blogs.

In March 2004, “New Media Musings” reported that *Variety.com* was the first newspaper to support trackback links on all articles and reviews. [11] This represents a major shift in information flow. Traditionally, information moved one-way from the medium (newspaper) to the reader; *Variety* is acknowledging the power of blogging’s two-way information channel and the importance of participatory journalism.

Most blog authors are amateurs with a passion; many are subject matter experts. A few are professional writers who use their blogs to further other pursuits, such as books or freelance writing. More frequently, the blogger may be a professional journalist, sometimes writing an “official” blog for the media company that pays the bills. Whether this is co-opting the medium or a welcome move towards participatory journalism is debatable. Nevertheless, blogging and blogging technologies are now mainstream, evidence of the technology’s influence on traditional media. The technology has also affected political campaigns.

### 2.2 Effect on Politics

Political campaigns began using the Web to provide information about issues and schedules in the 1996 election. However, there was little impact due in part to paucity of Americans on the Internet. That situation has changed; Pew Internet Research estimates that there are 126 million Web users in America; 77% used the Internet in connection with the war in Iraq during the first week of action. [16]

Given this increased level of awareness—55 percent of Americans use the Net regularly and 70 percent have access – it is not surprising that Democratic Presidential candidates Wesley Clark,<sup>8</sup> Howard Dean,<sup>9</sup> John Edwards,<sup>10</sup> Bob Graham and John Kerry<sup>11</sup> included blogs on their Web sites.

Dean was the first candidate to create a blog, called Blog for America; the campaign also created a separate blog to target younger voters. Reflecting the culture of blogging,

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cyberjournalist.net/cyberjournalists.php>

<sup>5</sup> <http://weblog.siliconvalley.com/column/dangillmor/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.opinionjournal.com/best/>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> <http://campaign.forclark.com>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.blogforamerica.com>

<sup>10</sup> <http://blog.johnedwards2004.com>

<sup>11</sup> <http://blog.johnkerry.com>

Dean's blog allowed comments and Trackback. By September 2003, it had 30,000 visitors per day. Clark, on the other hand, had less than 2,000 members as of December. Kerry launched his blog in August 2003 and ran into problems with a no-registration-required commenting policy; that policy changed in November. Bob Graham launched his blog in August and his campaign in October. Edwards requires registration before entering. [4]

In addition to using Web sites and blogs to provide timely information about issues, candidates can, and do, use them as a constant pitch for money. The tension between "commerce" and "content" is evident in politics, just as it is with online news sites.

The campaigns experienced predictable challenges with the use of a new technology and a fast-growing customer base. Now that there are effectively only two candidates, the latest political blogging tool provides a side-by-side comparison of the Kerry and Bush blogs. Using blog's syndication feature, "Cool/Lame" (fig. 1) is providing this service for Web consumers.<sup>12</sup>

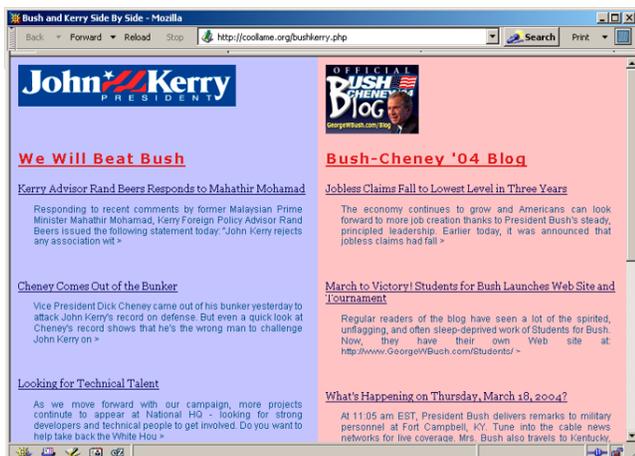


Figure 1. The site "Cool/Lame" uses the syndication feature to provide a side-by-side comparison of the Kerry and Bush campaign blogs.

President Bush praised bloggers at a National Prayer Breakfast during a week when tragedy struck the blogging community. First, blogger Scott Elliott discovered that his parents were two of the missionaries killed in a drive-by shooting in Iraq on March 15, 2004. Hours later, word came that blogger Bob Zangas, a Marine reservist, was killed in an ambush outside of Baghdad. The news spread like wildfire throughout the blogosphere. [6]

It is unlikely that the Net or a candidate blog will provide sufficient motivation for individuals to become politically active; the desire to be involved in politics must come first. But for those Americans who are politically active, candidate blogs are an inexpensive way to engage and

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.coollame.org/bushkerry.php>

inform citizens. Whether operating in the political landscape or that of new media, to be successful, blogs must reflect expectations learned in the super-arching blogosphere.

### 3. BLOGOSPHERE INFLUENCE

How do we measure intellectual influence? How do we measure the impact that a single blog might have, either on the mainstream media or the blogosphere? This paper has shown that blogs are influencing the mainstream press by stimulating professional journalists to blog, on- or off their employer site. Another reflection of influence is how blogs are shaping stories and the news agenda. However, trying to measure influence within the global blogosphere by applying mathematical algorithms has challenges similar to those faced by academics when citation-counting.

#### 3.1 Making and Breaking News

Blogging can empower a new group of writers to challenge a storyline presented by mainstream media. It can empower them to move from observer status to commentator or even shaper of events. When this occurs, journalists may find themselves being questioned, not the questioner. No incident illustrates this like the Trent Lott story:

It was Thursday, December 5, 2002; the occasion was Sen. Strom Thurmond's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. As Sen. Trent Lott (R-MS) began his tribute, he said, "I want to say this about my state. When Strom Thurmond ran for president, we voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over the all these years either."

His remarks seemed to stun the crowd; a later report said that there was an "audible gasp." Although Lott's remarks were noticed by the mainstream press covering the event, the post-event stories that ran Friday morning were short and buried; no major newspaper reported on Lott's off the cuff comment.

Ed O'Keefe found the remarks newsworthy; the ABC News reporter was familiar with the pro-segregationist platform of Thurmond's Dixiecrat Party. Although the lack of coverage from his peers caused him second thoughts, he pushed the story. Consequently, ABC News aired a brief piece at 4.30 am EST Friday; it included a videotape of Lott's comments about the run for the presidency.

The speech was also included on the ABCNews.com Web site as part of a daily news summary. The only other coverage from mainstream media ran in the Saturday *Washington Post*. Tom Edsall, the *Post* reporter, provided the first detailed context for Lott's remarks; however, Saturday papers have notoriously poor readership.

Although the mainstream press ignored the story, two

bloggers – “Atrios” and Joshua Marshall – independently uncovered and reported the remarks on Friday. Glenn Reynolds, of “InstaPundit” fame, learned about the incident from Marshall’s blog, “Talking Points Memo;” he posted at 9.15 pm.

At 12.16 am, Monday, December 9, conservative blogger Andrew Sullivan stated on his blog that “Trent Lott Must Go.” Like his peers, Sullivan questioned the reticence exhibited by both politicians and media pundits. However on Monday several conservative commentators did speak out, often on blogs; they, too, questioned Lott’s suitability for the position of Senate Majority Leader.

It’s now Tuesday, December 10. Howard Kurtz of the *Washington Post* addressed the speech in his column. Kurtz commented that if a Democrat had “made this kind of inflammatory comment, it would be the buzz of talk radio and the *Wall Street Journal* would be calling for tarring and feathering.”

That day, a historian contacted the *Post* and, when the paper was slow to respond, he turned to the *New York Times* with evidence that Lott had used the exact same phrase in November 1980 when introducing Thurmond at an event. That story, which ran in both papers on December 11, broke the logjam. On Thursday, President Bush delivered a rebuke. On Friday December 20, Lott resigned as Majority Leader. [19]

How did Lott’s speech move from being a non-story to a showstopper? And why did it take so long to become a major news story? There are various theories, but a common theme is that the blogosphere affected the reporting. The vagaries of the news cycle underpin this theory.

Linda Feldman, writing in the *Christian Science Monitor*, suggests this was an event that caught “the press off-guard and [was] then brought to life by a combination of forces: the Internet, mainstream reporters, outside activists, and political insiders themselves... Internet sleuths and other reporters who have dug into Lott’s past, including his record of opposing civil rights measures and contacts with a white supremacist organization called the Council of Conservative Citizens, have also fueled the firestorm.” [5]

In a *Newsweek* interview, Larry J. Sabato said, “Maybe the press wasn’t that shocked. That shows a disconnect between people and the media, because to cover Washington is to become cynical... Average people have a different, much more human reaction which is to take a more genuine offense.”<sup>13</sup> Bloggers are both more distanced from the

Washington scene and much closer to being “average” people.

Because this story broke on Friday, weekend traffic in the blogosphere kept the story alive until Monday. News stories have a short life; if they don’t capture the imagination of the public or reporters or editors within 24 hours, there usually is no second chance. In this instance, bloggers were like a steady drumbeat, building volume and cadence until major media listened.

Bloggers can serve as grassroots reporters or fact checkers for business news as well. In 2002, Microsoft was caught using a “fake” ad that recounted the story of a Mac user converting to Windows. As the BBC reports it, “Web researchers” unearthed the fact that the alleged switcher worked for a marketing company employed by the firm. [2]

The story surfaced on Slashdot as an amusing “they’re copying Apple” posting. Alert readers determined the photo was stock (Apple’s switch ads featured photos of real people); that the ad did not mention the woman’s name (Apple’s switch ads named names); and that the copy read like it was written by a marketing department (it was, the firm that employed the woman in the ad). An AP reporter who monitors Slashdot tracked down the woman’s name and credited the Slashdot community in his article. Microsoft pulled the ad. [10]

As more reporters monitor the blogosphere, it should have more influence in setting the news agenda. Successful scenarios like the Lott and Microsoft examples build a foundation of trust for bloggers and traditional journalists. But the question remains: how do we determine which bloggers are influencing the blogosphere? What variables should we measure?

### 3.2 Influence Within the Blogosphere

How do we measure intellectual influence with the blogosphere? Academia has struggled with this question – how to measure influence within a field of study – for far longer than blogs have existed, and it has yet to develop a definitive measurement.

The classic academic solution has been to count citations; the corollary for blogs would be to count hypertext links. Counting citations assumes that there is a positive relationship between citation quantity and the characteristics it is intended to measure: influence, reputation or quality. Counting is simplistic: it treats all citations as though they were equal. [15] Academicians have attempted to counter this criticism by weighting citations. For example, journals may be ranked by prestige or impact; citations in higher prestige journals would be given a greater weight than those of lower prestige.

If we are to measure blog influence using an offshoot of an academic technique, does a mere count serve as an

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<sup>13</sup> As quoted in Suzanne Smalley, “Slow Burn,” *Newsweek Web Exclusive*, December 13, 2002, [http://www.keepmedia.com/ShowItemDetails.do;jsessionid=auNli canK-c8?from=search&item\\_id=313368](http://www.keepmedia.com/ShowItemDetails.do;jsessionid=auNli canK-c8?from=search&item_id=313368).

adequate proxy for influence? In other words, are all links created equal? And which links should be counted, those to a blog (blogrolling) or those to a post (permalink)? Is a post that is one paragraph with a link to a news story equivalent to one that is a researched essay? Just as academia has failed to reach a consensus, the blog world has yet to reach a definitive measurement, and different answers to these questions will yield different results. We'll look at four different mathematical attempts to measure influence: Blogosphere, BlogRunner, BlogStreet, and Technorati.

#### *Blogosphere*

Blogosphere<sup>14</sup> provides a snapshot of about 150,000 blogs and is updated infrequently. This tool counts all outgoing links from the blogs (not just blogrolls), but it does not filter out blog hosting companies; therefore, its top sites are blogging hosts, not individual blogs. In addition, this list includes Google, *Wired* and the *New York Times*. Finally, it is not updated regularly; the last update was September 2003. This tool provides a snapshot of some sites of interest, but does little to help identify influential bloggers.

#### *BlogRunner*

BlogRunner<sup>15</sup> creates a list of the most influential authors<sup>16</sup> – which also mixes grassroots bloggers with professional journalists – by counting the cumulative number of unique inbound links to articles and posts authored in the past 60 days. By treating all links equally, this methodology favors industrious bloggers and under-represents anyone who posts only 2-3 times per week, even if the less frequent posts have more substance. However, the tool uses link-weighting that is a variant of the Google page-rank system. Moreover, by including posts over a period of 60 days (instead of 24 hours), this service provides a chance for new blogs to rise to the top of the list. In addition, the tool identifies which news articles and which books are currently the most popular topics of discussion within the blogosphere. The site watches more than 200,000 blogs and news feeds.

#### *BlogStreet*

BlogStreet<sup>17</sup> watches 144,192 blogs. Only blogroll links are counted; BlogStreet does not count links to individual blog posts. It has developed a “Blog Influence Quotient” (BIQ) to rank a blog’s importance or influence. If a blog with a high BIQ blogrolls site-x, then the site-x BIQ goes up (and vice versa). Thus BlogStreet is also attempting to implement the academic concept of weighting citations. It assumes that adding a blogroll entry (the equivalent of a bookmark on a browser) directly correlates with influence. BlogStreet also maintains an unweighted list (Top 100<sup>18</sup>), which assigns ranking solely by number of links. This un-

weighted list shows a dramatically different set of top-ranked blogs. Both rankings are displayed on the “Most Influential”<sup>19</sup> list.

In addition, the site provides detailed insight into any blog that it indexes. This data view provides information about the blogger, the blog site ranking, its BIQ, a user/member rating and category. Neighborhood shows sites that BlogStreet thinks you might like; this is like Amazon’s suggestions. Google Relatives are blogs that Google thinks are related to this blog. BlogBack lists the blogs that are blogrolling this site. RSS Discovery will automatically find an existing feed. This is a nifty tool for anyone who wants to browse blogs.

#### *Technorati*

Technorati watches almost 2 million blogs and 250+ million links, which makes it the most comprehensive of the four tools. It describes itself as a “conversation search engine” where conversation is defined as “linked” writing. It publishes two lists, one sorted by freshness and the other by authority.<sup>20</sup> The freshness list ranks blogs by update time. Technorati counts inbound links and then weights them to produce the Authority ranking. The measurements constantly change as bloggers update their sites, but the record exists from the first time a link is registered. Thus the time scale is longer than BlogRunner.

Like Blogstreet, Technorati provides insight into any blog that it indexes. It provides one-click access to a blog’s Google ranking or all the blogs that link to a site. It shows exactly how many inbound links it has counted (blogroll) and when the site was last updated. There is a toggle to show ranking by authority versus ranking by freshness. Finally, it reports an excerpt from the referring blog and the time that the referring link was created.

Like BlogRunner, Technorati publishes a list of news articles that are currently being discussed. Other rankings list books and current events.

#### *The Influentials*

Despite the variation in how each site measures influence, there are two blogs that appeared in all five “Top 15” lists on 17 March 2004. Those sites could be labeled “influential” with the qualifier that this is a measure of influence at one point in time. They are (in alphabetical order):

- BoingBoing: A Directory of Wonderful Things<sup>21</sup>
- InstaPundit<sup>22</sup>

The next set of blogs appears in four of the five listings and also should be considered influential:

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.blogosphere.us/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.blogrunner.com/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.blogrunner.com/snapshot/top-authors-00.html>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.blogstreet.com/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.blogstreet.com/top100.html>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.blogstreet.com/biq100.html>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.technorati.com/cosmos/top100.html>

<sup>21</sup> <http://boingboing.net/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.instupundict.com/>

- Daily Dish<sup>23</sup>
- Eschaton<sup>24</sup>
- Scripting News<sup>25</sup>
- Talking Points Memo<sup>26</sup>

What do these sites have in common? They are established blogs and are written by professionals with excellent writing skills (law and journalism), with one exception, Eschaton, which is both the youngest and the only anonymous blog on the list.

- *Launched 1 April 1997.* **Scripting News** is the longest continually running blog on the Web. Its author, Harvard Law Professor David M. Winer, writes about a wide range of topics. Short and long posts daily; date-stamped but not time-stamped.
- *Launched 21 January 2000.* **BoingBoing**, “A Directory of Wonderful Things,” is a community blog, with four regular authors as well as a guest author. The blog covers a wide range of topics; the founders are alumni of *Wired*. Many short-medium posts daily.
- *Launched 13 November 2000.* Joshua Micah Marshall, a contributing writer at the *Washington Monthly*, publishes **Talking Points Memo**. Daily audience for this progressive site is reportedly 45,000, the size of a medium-sized daily newspaper. Several medium-long posts daily.
- *Launched 2 January 2001.* Andrew Sullivan, the former editor of *The New Republic*, edits the **Daily Dish**, which covers politics and society from a conservative viewpoint. Many short posts daily.
- *Launched 8 August 2001.* **InstaPundit** is Glenn Reynolds, a law professor at the University of Tennessee. His specialty is the intersection of individual liberty and technology. Many short-medium-long posts daily.
- *Launched 17 April 2002.* The youngest and most liberal blog on the list, **Eschaton** is written by Atrios (pseudonym). Many short-medium posts per day.

Interestingly, two sites that I would have expected to be ranked as influential due to their seniority and notoriety are “Slashdot: News for nerds, stuff that matters”<sup>27</sup> and the “Drudge Report.”<sup>28</sup> Both appeared only in the two basic Top 100 lists. “Slashdot” is influential when blogrolls is the primary criterion. “Drudge” site statistics show that it’s not as popular as I thought; the site averages only about 25,000 visits per day, which is one-quarter of “InstaPundit.” In addition, Drudge isn’t truly a blog although it is an

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.andrewsullivan.com/>

<sup>24</sup> <http://atrios.blogspot.com/>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.scripting.com/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.slashdot.org/>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.drudgereport.com/>

influential Web site. The relatively low ranking of major media blogs suggests that current methodologies may be biased towards the industrious blogger: post concisely, post often.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In the five years since blogging software opened this form of journaling to nontechnical writers, blogs have exploded on the Web’s landscape. In the process, bloggers are influencing the world outside of the blogosphere, as measured by audience reach, media adoption and political necessity. Attempts to mathematically determine which blogs are the most influential are currently characterized by the shortcoming of just counting blogs and links. This methodology is not unlike asking “who is the most influential scientist in the world” and then counting citations to determine the answer: neither process measures influence within genres, such as politics, cooking or technology.

In addition, there appears to be little attempt to determine influence other than through a mathematical formula based on counting links. Research questions include: Which link is the more representative of influence, blogroll or individual post? Should a blogger who posts short blurbs several times during a day be considered more influential than someone who posts less often but with more depth? That’s how the system works today with some tools, but is it the way it should work?

Finally, despite the poor showing of Drudge and Slashdot in my initial review of the ranking services, blogs that have been online longer will have an advantage over the new blogger because those historical links contribute to the gross link number. It remains to be seen if a viable automated tool can be built to effectively measure the influence of a single blog on the entire space or of a genre, such as politics. Will political blogs retain their popularity after the 2004 presidential election? It also remains to be seen if a schism will develop between the professionals (paid journalists) and amateurs; this division is already apparent in existing measurement tools.

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**Note:** Web sites accessed 17 and 18 March 2004