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Mapping the journalism–blogging relationship

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ABSTRACT

Using a systems framework from the sociology of occupations, this article maps the journalism–blogging relationship, revealing areas of conflict between the two, vulnerabilities, and predictors of vulnerability. The systems framework suggests occupations exist within a network of other occupations and that they encroach into each other's jurisdictional areas. A variety of factors shape these fluid processes. Factors that are external to the occupation include organizational division of labor, revenue needs, and relationships with other institutions. Internal factors include the degree to which journalists control the definition of problems and inference to solutions, and the success with which they solve problems. Difficulties posed by external and internal factors have led journalism to neglect some types of news information, which in turn have been poached by bloggers. These include partisan expression, 'old stories', stories driven by non-elite sources, and highly specialized content. A model for future study is constructed from these observations.

KEY WORDS ■ blogging ■ journalists ■ news organizations ■ news sociology ■ online ■ professional control

Depending on whom you ask, the blog – a frequently updated personal Web page with links to related sites – presents a challenge to journalism, an opportunity for journalism, or a bit of both. Blogging has been portrayed as exposing journalism's weak points (Regan, 2003: 69), as a force that will 'blow open holes in the gatekeepers' firewalls', and as ending journalism's reign of 'sovereignty' (Rosen, 2005). Bloggers claim to have toppled CNN news head Eason Jordan, to have forced Dan Rather to resign over CBS reporting errors (Glaser, 2004a; Seeyle, 2005), and to have kept the heat on *New York Times* editor Howell Raines after the Jayson Blair scandal (Regan, 2003).

The rhetoric from both bloggers and journalists has been acrimonious. But recently a number of observers of online media have declared the argument

passé. J. D. Lasica (2003) says bloggers and journalists 'complement each other, intersect with each other, play off one another' (p. 73). Jay Rosen (2005) agrees, calling the journalist vs blogger debate false and reductive. Yet if the 'sovereignty' of traditional journalism is declining, or blogging is truly exposing journalism's weak points, it does not seem likely the hard feelings and angry words will dissipate soon. Blogging sites are full of contemptuous references to 'big journalism', and 'watchblogs' have developed to track news coverage (Glaser, 2004b; Matheson, 2004) and 'shame journalists into doing their jobs better' (Smolkin, 2004: 40). Conflict is likely to continue because bloggers and journalists stake out much of the same turf. Each claims some jurisdiction over the tasks of selecting events and issues for audience attention, commenting on these issues, and, to a lesser degree, gathering information for reports.

There has been much discussion about how blogging can foster open, intelligent, and productive public discussion, and how bloggers can spur journalists to produce more accurate, honest, and socially relevant reporting (Gillmor, 2003; Lasica, 2003; Wall, 2005). These optimistic notions may be warranted. Yet journalists and bloggers may be more interested in maintaining or seeking authority than on benefiting society. Individual motivation and action are also constrained and fostered by social factors such as organizational resources, professional processes, and technological change. It is necessary to map the relationship between journalists and bloggers so that these factors can be seen plainly. Then we may better judge if constructive change has a chance, and, if so, what forms such changes may take.¹ This article is an effort to lay out the vulnerabilities and strengths of journalism and blogging, to reveal the likely areas of conflict, and to suggest directions for future study.

In mapping the blogging–journalism relationship, a number of questions are addressed: In what aspects of their work are journalists vulnerable to the blogging movement? What predicts vulnerabilities and strengths? What changes, if any, will journalists be compelled to make, and what are the social implications of such changes? What future research is suggested by these relationships?

To address these questions, a 'systems' framework from the sociology of occupations is adopted. According to this framework, occupations exist within a network of other occupations and institutions, occupations seek to encroach into the jurisdictional areas of other occupations, and these competitions influence work processes (Abbott, 1988; Child and Fulk, 1982; Friedson, 1994; Simpson, 1985). A variety of factors shape these fluid processes, including technological change, relationships with clients (or audiences), and factors related to the organizations that house occupations, such as resources and the division of labor. Using this broader framework, a specific model is developed

in this theoretical essay to help explain the dynamics of the relationship between blogging and journalism.

Definitions and distinctions

Blogging refers to the production of easy-to-create Web pages with short, regularly updated items of information and commentary, and with links to information and commentary on other Web sites (Blood, 2003; Grabowicz, 2003; Lasica, 2003; Wall, 2004, 2005). In this article blogging refers specifically to the publishing of public-interest information and commentary. Such blogs run the gamut from those that specialize in a content area to those that address a variety of political topics.

Most blogs are personally published, and few bloggers receive compensation. Can such an activity be considered an occupation? Not by most definitions. To describe blogging as an occupation defies the commonly held perception that an occupation is associated with remunerative work. However, according to phenomenological and 'process' perspectives on work, occupations are always developing, changing and in some cases, devolving. From these perspectives, occupations are not determined by trait criteria (see e.g. Allison, 1986; McLeod and Hawley, 1964; Wilensky, 1964), but rather by the degree to which individuals perceive they perform similar activities and hold similar norms and values about their practices (Bloor and Dawson, 1994; Dingwall, 1976; Fine, 1996; Van Maanen and Barley, 1984). Certainly, bloggers perceive themselves as part of a community that shares values, rituals and language (Kramer, 2004).

Bloggers also have pursued outward trappings of occupational status. Blogging conferences and symposia abound (Kramer, 2004); university courses in blogging have been launched (Shachtman, 2002); codes of ethics or 'core values' have been considered (Kramer, 2004; Lasica, 2005); and bloggers have been granted some legal protection and are agitating for more (Gillmor, 2004; Kirtley, 2003). In this article, blogging is conceptualized as a budding occupational community that can have an impact on the system of occupations, and which is itself shaped within this system.

To map out areas of vulnerability and confrontation, blogging and journalism must be conceptually differentiated. The search for a fundamental difference reveals a number of possibilities, most of which have been discussed by media observers. For various reasons, none quite hit the mark. One is the difference in values and tone. Blogs have been called participatory, transparent and opinionated (Lasica, 2003; Wall, 2004, 2005). The traditional values of journalism are accuracy, fairness, and objectivity (International Federation of Journalists, 1986; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001; McQuail, 2000; Society of

Professional Journalists, 1996). Yet the pursuit of these journalistic values serves the news organization (Soloski, 1997[1989]; Tuchman, 1978). Another candidate is the news gathering process, which is a routine for journalists and a rarity for bloggers (Blood, 2003). However, the existence of the reporting specialty can also be traced to organizational differences, as the differentiation of tasks and the development of organizational structure historically have gone hand in hand (Russial, 1998; Solomon, 1995). The blog's interactive online format is another possible distinguishing feature. Yet hyperlinking to other websites is just as possible on mainstream journalism sites as on blogs, though journalists do not make these connections as routinely as bloggers.

Ultimately then, it is argued that the organization of production is the most fundamental distinction between journalism and blogging. Differences in content, work processes, tone, values and format are symptoms of this underlying structural difference. This distinction is conceptualized here as a graduated scale, with organization-based media as an ideal type on one end and personal media as an ideal type on the other end.

The issue of unit of analysis should also be addressed. From one perspective, bloggers are individual, atomized publishers. Turn the prism, and they become connecting strands in a vast network. Some blogging enthusiasts say that rigorous reporting and accuracy by individual bloggers is not crucial because the web of other bloggers acts as a safety net for errors (Regan, 2003; Reynolds, 2004). Though this normative, Millsian argument is appealing, it is not certain that the blogging network would reliably produce accuracy. More study is needed to test this assumption.² Therefore, blogs are conceptualized here predominately as individual units, though implications for the blogging network, or 'blogosphere', are considered.

Sociology of professions: the process perspective

The sociology of professions, occupations and work provides the framework here for analyzing the relationship between blogging and journalism. The process perspective of occupations is particularly helpful because it conceptualizes occupational relationships as variable, emphasizing factors that shape changes in control over work, and steps occupations take to build and maintain control (Beam, 1990; Hughes, 1958; Ritzer, 1972). Sociologist Andrew Abbott's systems theory of professions (1988), a process perspective, holds that occupations exist in an interrelated system and compete for jurisdiction over 'work tasks', or 'human problems amenable to expert service'.

The theory is useful because it incorporates both sociological structures and a sense of mutability into the analysis of journalism's relative dominance.

Abbott's theory brings to mind ecological perspectives in the study of organizations and in the study of mass communication, which situate media institutions within interdependent networks of other institutions, assume competition over resources and acknowledge change in control and impact (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976; Perrow, 1986; Turow, 1997). A number of discursive studies have explored alternatives to journalism and the struggle over symbolic power at journalism's edges (Dooley, 1999; Downing et al., 2001). The present study takes a different approach, focusing on the impact of social structures in shaping these struggles, rather than solely on the re-articulation of practices, norms and values (Matheson, 2004). By conceptualizing occupational communities as entities that struggle to adapt, the theory incorporates agency as well as structure. Journalism changes not only because it is shaped by external constraints, which 'hierarchical' models of influence on media have proposed (e.g. Dimmick and Coit, 1982; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996), but because decision-makers react to constraints.

According to Abbott, the links between tasks and the occupations that claim them ('jurisdictional claims', 1998: 2) are pressured, reshaped, strengthened and sometimes broken by both 'objective' qualities of the environment and 'subjective' qualities of the professional process. Objective qualities are external to the occupation. They include changes in technology, economic well-being of an industry or an organization that houses professional work, the structure and size of organizations, characteristics of the organization's community, government regulations, legal backing, and efforts by rival occupations to expand their jurisdictions (Abbott, 1988; Child and Fulk, 1982; Freidson, 1994; Larson, 1977; Weeden, 2002; Zetka, 2001). Subjective qualities are internal to the occupation and make up the logic of the occupation's claim of jurisdiction. Examples include the ways occupations define problems and client needs, the degree to which the solution-finding process is exclusive to the occupation, and the claims of efficacy of solutions (Abbott, 1988; Child and Fulk, 1982; Dooley, 1999; Hoff and McCaffrey, 1996; Zetka, 2001). In the face of objective changes, occupations may adjust these subjective qualities of their work goals, tasks and processes in order to maintain jurisdiction over areas of work (Abbott, 1988; Child and Fulk, 1982; Dooley, 1999).

Subjective qualities are found in the three stages of occupational practice: *diagnosis*, which involves gathering information and categorizing problems, *treatment*, which involves supplying solutions, and *inference*, which connects diagnosis to treatment.

In the past, journalists have altered their diagnosis, inference and treatment stages in response to encroachment by rival occupations – most notably to public relations (Abbott, 1988; McQuail, 2000; Schudson, 1978) and politicians (Dooley, 1999). The professional practices of objectivity, balance and

news analysis were partly the result of a perceived need to reposition goals and practices in the face of competition (Schudson, 1978). Similarly, it is argued here that pressure from the blogging movement challenges the jurisdictional claim of journalists.

This article develops a model that helps to explain the impact of occupational competition on journalism – here exemplified by the blogging challenge – as well as journalism’s reaction to this competition. Ultimately this model (Figure 1) will show that journalists shift subjective qualities of their professional process to cover areas that become vulnerable to occupational competition and which challenge their ability to control information work. Journalists use intra-professional discussion through venues such as conventions and trade publications to determine which directions they need to shift to repair vulnerabilities. Through these discussions, journalists redefine problems, audience, goals, and even the nature of journalism and journalists. External objective constraints and benefits, such as organizational structure and resources, and legal constraints, affect how vulnerable journalists are and shape journalists’ efforts to change professional knowledge and practice. These objective and subjective qualities and their impact on journalism are explored throughout the rest of this article. The full model, which proposes dynamic relationships among journalism, blogging and their objective and subjective qualities, is examined in the final section.

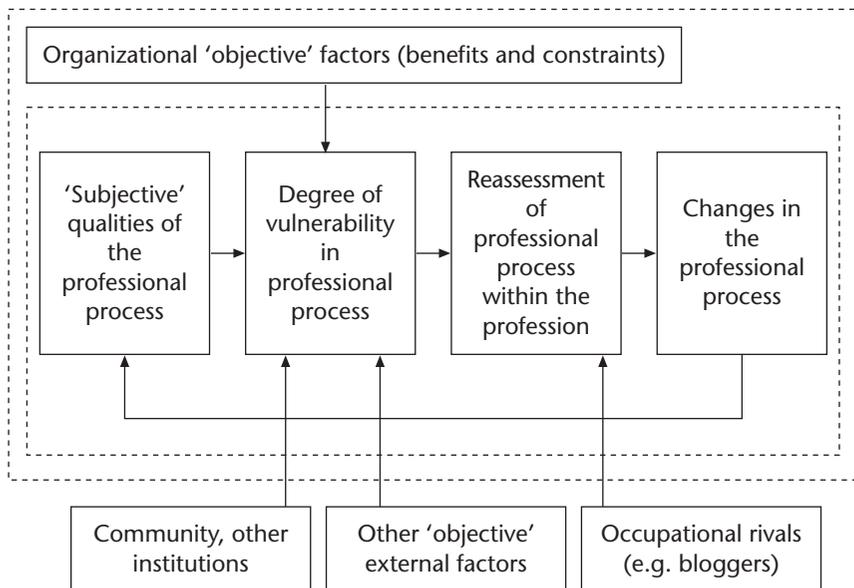


Figure 1 Factors influencing the professional process

Objective qualities of work: advantages for journalism

The march of bureaucracy in the 19th and 20th centuries has been the most significant objective influence on occupations, both strengthening and weakening (and even creating and abolishing) occupations through the commodification of professional knowledge, the impact of organized capital, and the increased division of labor (Abbott, 1988). Generally, bureaucratization has allowed dominant occupations to strengthen their control over rivals (Abbott, 1988). This has been the case for journalism. Both corporately and individually owned structures offer physical capital, which strengthens the ability to control work in the face of rivals who are hard put to purchase land, buildings, technology, raw material and labor.

Journalists benefit from their organizations' physical capital in the form of pay and benefits. Most bloggers are not paid for their efforts, and they therefore lack this incentive for the grittier, less glamorous aspects of news work, such as tracking down sources, and attending local government meetings. Lack of pay and benefits also prevents bloggers from attending to these efforts on a full-time basis. Thus bloggers are dependent on mainstream news media for original reporting, a situation that strengthens the position of mainstream journalism. This could be changing, as advertising and corporate money gifts in exchange for mentions in postings are becoming more common (Lasica, 2005). Though compensation allows bloggers more time and incentive to produce, dependency on compensation could alter the nature of blogging, and in fact bloggers disagree about the appropriateness of compensation (Lasica, 2005).

Journalists also benefit from the organizational division of labor. The larger the organization, the greater the specialization, and the greater the opportunity to develop expertise in coverage areas (Blau, 1970; Hall, 1999). The individual blogger is much less able to specialize in multiple knowledge areas. From the perspective that bloggers are part of an interconnected 'blogosphere', 'the depth of experience represented by bloggers collectively far exceeds even the largest research division of a traditional media outlet' (Michael Turk, quoted in Glaser, 2004a). However, new technologies may be needed to further facilitate these connections, and to make it easier to assess accuracy (Lasica, 2002c; Outing, 2002). It is too early to view blogging as a functional network of specialized expertise.

The organization's division of labor helps reporters nourish relationships with outside source institutions. This in turn encourages outside institutions to make and maintain connections with the news organization. Source institutions and advertisers prefer predictable relationships between their boundary personnel and news organizations' boundary personnel, and in fact they work to socialize reporters to the norms and practices of their institutions (Griswold,

1999). News organizations offer source institutions predictability in reporting roles that bloggers cannot because the beat reporting slot outlasts the individuals who fill it.

The division of labor and organizational resources also make the editing role more likely. Though bloggers complain that traditional news organizations can overly edit content, turning strong prose 'limp, lifeless, sterile and homogenized' (Lasica, 2002b), bloggers often emphasize immediacy and opinion at the expense of accuracy, which is a problem an editing process could address (Lasica, 2003; Weintraub, 2003).

Organizations are also more likely to formalize their standards, and bureaucratization encourages the development of punishments and rewards for violating these standards (Hall, 1999; Perrow, 1986). Organizations tend to embrace, standardize and formalize many of the norms and practices of the occupations they house – particularly the norms and practices that benefit the organization (Abbott, 1991; Bloor and Dawson, 1994). For example, the pursuit of accuracy helps shield news organization from both diminishing audiences and lawsuits. Consequently, formal ethics standards are tied to formal punishments and rewards to help ensure these organizationally sanctioned behaviors. In contrast, when bloggers publish inaccuracies, the stakes are lower. They may suffer scathing remarks from fellow bloggers, but they risk no concrete loss of benefits or tangible punishments.

Organizational structures also encourage stratification of professional labor (Abbott, 1988; Leicht and Fennell, 1997), which can help an occupation fend off competition. Subgroups develop with expertise that matches the expertise of challenging occupations. The challenge of the blogging movement makes the expertise of the newsroom's online journalist more valuable to journalism and thereby may raise their status within journalism. More importantly for the occupation, online journalists' understanding of the blogging form serves journalism, making it easier to co-opt this form.

Size and resources also enhance an organization's legitimacy with other institutions in the social system, particularly those that depend on media for the shaping of their public image and for the dissemination of information (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Institutional news derives power from the dependency that other institutions have on their resources (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976; Pfeffer, 1981). Source institutions and advertisers are much more likely to risk devoting their own limited resources to large media organizations that reach wide audiences and have well-developed internal structures, plentiful resources and well-known track records (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Abbott (1988) gives an example from architecture, in which large organizations with building needs that are complex and demanding are likely to contact big architectural firms because their sophisticated division of labor allows them to design large, complex buildings. The impact of external

institutions is included as ‘community and other institutions’ in the model in Figure 1.

Legal structures also seem to favor institutional journalists (see model in Figure 1). Though in the USA both bloggers and institutional journalists are entitled to claim all the benefits of First Amendment protection (Kirtley, 2003), several recent rulings against bloggers have negative consequences for bloggers’ practice of freely linking to other sites (Gillmor, 2004; Hempel, 2005). Reporters in journalism organizations can be more sure of their footing because of in-house lawyers, experienced editors and the editing process. Also, some US states protect source identity only for journalists working for media organizations. Because bloggers tend to eschew the professional routines of institutional journalists, they may not fare well in libel suits when news-gathering techniques are examined (Kirtley, 2003). However the law in these matters is very much in flux, and therefore the impact of legal decisions on the blogging–journalism relationship is difficult to assess with accuracy.

Journalists also benefit from what Abbott (1988) calls ‘association with the machinery’. Like the profession of law, whose members staff the government legislatures that enforce legal jurisdiction, journalism receives support from the many journalists and former journalists occupying high places in the information structure (in journalism organizations, government positions, and PR institutions). Despite the challenge from bloggers, journalists still control many of the forums in which the journalism–blogging debate is being waged, including media publications, trade publications, and the journalism academic community.

Objective qualities: disadvantages for journalism

Journalism is a porous occupation. There is no licensure, and though there are schools of journalism, they need not be accredited, it is not required that the occupational group sanction them, and it is common for news organizations to hire individuals without journalism degrees. Professional organizations such as the International Federation of Journalists, the Society of Professional Journalists, and the Radio and Television News Directors Association, among others, have laid down formal principles of ethical conduct, but such groups lack formal power to sanction members who violate their principles (Allison, 1986; Beam, 1990). In short, journalists ‘are ill-disposed to point out how blogs lack their dedication to professionalism’ (Park, 2004).³ The most significant barrier to entry is the news organization, but hiring decisions tend to be based on the particular needs of individual organizations rather than concerns of the occupation at large (Lowrey et al., 2003).

Though organizational structure offers benefits, there are drawbacks. Being housed in an organization means journalists must compromise professional values so as to move in directions that enable organizational survival or ensure corporate profit. For journalists this may mean adopting a marketing or entertainment orientation at the expense of serving the public through in-depth and meaningful coverage and opinion (Beam, 1990; McManus, 1994). Also, the demands and constraints of routinized production mean journalists must typify some events as news and ignore others. Tuchman (1978) says journalists use a 'news net', which allows small stories through but which catches big ones. As personal publishers, bloggers are not constrained in this way and are free to challenge the adequacy and thoroughness of journalists' coverage of public interest issues.

Organizational size can also be a drawback. The larger the news organization, the bigger the target for bloggers. Organizational size can also limit variety of expression in a market. Large organizations require large amounts of physical capital and therefore rely heavily on advertising revenue, which in turn necessitates a wide audience. Attempts to appeal to a wide, diverse audience through a single product leads to homogeneity, 'safeness' and an emphasis on balance in media content (Golding and Murdock, 1997; McQuail, 2000). The need for large audiences has tamed mainstream journalists' self-expression and has made strident partisanship largely taboo, thus partly relinquishing journalism's jurisdiction over partisan coverage and strongly expressive content. These forms of expression are therefore vulnerable to poaching from beyond journalism.

Presumably, most bloggers would like larger audiences too, as 'he or she who gets the most links wins in the world of weblogging' (Powers, 2003). Most bloggers seek links from other sites (Glaser, 2003), and it has become more common to see advertising on blogs (Lasica, 2005), a trend that portends economic challenge to journalists. However, gaining larger audiences leads to the perception that no one group can be offended, which in turn may lead to 'safe' homogeneous content. Many bloggers eschew claims of objectivity by traditional journalism organizations. As blogger Markos Moulitsas says, 'I can write about whatever I want. . . at the end of the day, I don't need advertisers' (Smolkin, 2004: 43). Whether the allure of financial success and larger audiences will alter this conviction remains to be seen.

Technological change in the form of the internet is an often discussed objective challenge to journalists' control over news information work. Traditionally, the costs of expensive technology have been prohibitive for gathering and producing news content and distributing products. The internet has provided bloggers access to content through postings and links to other Web sites, as well as inexpensive, easy and instant distribution. Bloggers are hopeful

that future technologies will improve the credibility of information from the blogging network (Lasica, 2002a).

Traditional print journalism also has the technological constraint of the periodic production cycle. Audiences and advertisers expect daily consumption of fresh news at predictable times. Though journalists also offer online content, much of this content is tied to print and broadcast schedules and is not continually updated (Lowrey, 2003; Singer, 2002). In contrast, the technology on which blogging is based encourages a fluid stream of information and commentary. The boundary between ‘old news’ and ‘new news’ is less clear, and thus it is more likely that bloggers will produce content based on stories that have been abandoned by traditional journalism organizations. Thus journalism nourishes blogging by allowing bloggers to ‘feed’ on discarded news, an image that calls to mind Tuchman’s news net analogy. Continuous publication also creates a ‘gratification opportunity’ for audiences, to use the language of media niche theory (Dimmick et al., 2004). Bloggers’ online production offers audiences more choice of content and more flexibility to set their media use schedules.

Subjective characteristics of work – the internal logic of professional practice

Occupational authority is not solely determined by external, objective characteristics of their work. Work also has an internal logic that must be controlled. According to this logic, occupations connect problems with solutions – i.e. occupational practice progresses through the stages of *diagnosis* to *inference* to *treatment*. Each of these stages has subjective qualities that shape an occupation’s vulnerability to competitors. An occupation can strengthen its position by controlling such aspects as the way it classifies problems, the nature of diagnosis categories, and criteria for acceptable treatment.

Diagnosis

During diagnosis, occupations take in information about a client’s problem and connect these problems to categorized solutions. It is assumed here that the journalist’s client is the audience member.⁴ Journalists assume audiences have broad needs, in part because they do not meet with these clients on an individual basis (McQuail, 2000). Their client is an ‘everyclient’ or ‘average client’, and journalists have developed beats, or more specific categories to match the presumably broad needs of clients and communities. Beats can be considered a list of available diagnoses, but the diagnoses are not highly specialized. This broad definition of the client leaves journalism vulnerable to

individuals on the outside (e.g. bloggers and PR practitioners) who specialize in narrow areas of knowledge and who therefore have more expertise than the average journalist.

When diagnosing, occupations try to restrict the type of information they receive so they can assemble a clear, unambiguous picture of the client's problem, thus maintaining greater control over the process. For example, a divorce lawyer does not want to hear about lingering affection between a client and an estranged spouse (Abbott, 1988), and professors prefer to restrict most discussion to class content. Likewise, journalists tend to discount information from non-officials in favor of official comments (McQuail, 2000; Tuchman, 1978), as 'the world is bureaucratically organized for the journalist' (Fishman, 1982). Occupational rules determining the relevance of information can sometimes be challenged. For example, bloggers may perpetuate commentary or information from non-officials, thereby weakening journalists' control over the information used for diagnosis. Blogger Paul Andrews raises the example of the 1999 World Trade Organization protests: 'Thankfully the protesters who want to get their story out can bypass the media by using live audio or a Webcam' (Lasica, 2002a).

All occupations have peripheral problems that their diagnosis classifications either do not address directly or address in a vague way. These problems are held weakly and leave the occupation vulnerable to inter-occupational poaching. For example, the medical profession has largely surrendered 'emotional problems' to psychiatrists and clergy (Abbott, 1988). For journalists, audience interest in highly partisan coverage is a peripheral concern. The organizational need for safe, non-offensive coverage constrains journalists from addressing this client need, except in a constrained way through institutional editorials and opinion columns. Thus, political blogs and cable and radio talk shows have moved into this area of vulnerability.

The cultural disconnect between journalists and audiences is another weakness in diagnosis. Blogging enthusiasts say journalists are out of touch with the interests and problems of their readers (Lasica, 2003; Regan, 2003; Rosen, 2005), pointing to recent surveys that suggest a gap between the values of institutional journalists and audiences (Pew Research Center, 2002). This cultural disconnect is a significant problem for journalists, as 'society has little time for experts who lack cultural legitimacy, irrespective of their success rates' (Abbott, 1988: 54). Bloggers assert that they truly represent the unfiltered voices of audiences who have been disenfranchised by mainstream media and who yearn to be heard. These claims, which seem shaky given that a small fraction of the audience read blogs,⁵ represent an attempt to define the nature of audience problems, and thereby reduce the work of journalism to a version that bloggers are well suited to perform – a common strategy in occupational competition (Abbott, 1988; Leicht and Fennel, 1997).

When faced with cultural disconnect, occupations try to use their abstract knowledge to clarify their foundations and retrace them to cultural values. Journalism's knowledge base is not as robust as that of many professions (such as medicine or engineering), but journalism does possess a rough set of principles that are debated and reshaped in journalism academia, professional conferences (e.g. through the Poynter Institute, the European Online Journalism Conference, etc.), print and online trade publications (e.g. the *British Press Gazette*, *Editor and Publisher*, *Online Journalism Review*), and in the news media itself. These intra-occupational dialogues facilitate journalists' ability to re-define their professional purposes and practices, and thus maintain jurisdiction over the work of producing public information.

Inference

During inference, the middle stage of the professional process, occupations infer treatment from diagnoses. For journalists this means investigating and analyzing community conditions during a particular time period (often a single day), with the broad diagnosis for the 'everyclient' in mind. Journalists then make sense of this particular 'case' (the day's conditions, happenings, etc.) so the appropriate treatment – news stories, photos, video – can be delivered.

The inference stage also has qualities that make an occupation's work more or less accessible to occupational rivals. One of these is the length of the chain of inference between diagnosis and treatment. For example, architects' long inference chain between the diagnosis of the client's needs and the final design stretches across the paths of engineers, lawyers and accountants, each of which has input into inference (Abbott, 1988). The journalist's inference path traverses public relations personnel, politicians, and, more recently, bloggers. Bloggers challenge journalists' accounts, highlight certain news issues and events, and occasionally, though not frequently, report news stories first hand. Recent publicity about bloggers' 'scoops' have encouraged a new routine in many newsrooms – checking blogging sites for information and commentary not covered by the wires. One study has found limited evidence that bloggers are helping to set the media's agenda (Delwiche, 2004).

A crucial aspect of inference is the degree of abstractness of the knowledge base. If the knowledge needed to connect diagnosis to treatment is routine, then rival occupations may perceive that they can easily perform the work. The journalist's abstract knowledge is embodied in their news judgment, which journalists use to infer which events in the world conform to the diagnosis of audience needs. Journalists predefine official events that are convenient to cover as news (Fishman, 1982; Shoemaker et al., 2001; Tuchman, 1978), they use the concepts of objectivity and balance as a way to routinize

the selection of sources (Schudson, 1978; Tuchman, 1978), and they rely on past coverage of breaking news stories to shape decisions about current breaking news stories (Berkowitz, 1992). Routinized inference leaves an occupation vulnerable to poaching from the outside. Blogging proponents frequently attack institutional journalism for lacking variety and diversity of coverage (Regan, 2003), for lacking depth (Mitchell, 2003), for being boring and corporate minded (Reynolds, 2003; Ringnalda, 2003), and for using the same sources repeatedly (Lasica, 2002a). As one blogger says, 'Up against the old, thick-shell. . . multi-cell media organisms, the blog is an ideal candidate to evolve and exploit new media challenges' (Copeland, 2003).

In the journalists' favor, the inference process for news information work is strongly related to the ability to gather news. Bloggers report some information, but most of the content of blogs is commentary on stories generated by journalists. Bloggers are dependent on journalists for most news information, which confers considerable power to journalists, relative to blogging. Bloggers who would report are hampered by a lack of resources and legitimacy that working within a news organization would provide. Bloggers are limited in their ability to obtain information from sources in society's powerful institutions, and they lack institutionalized incentive to report. As one blogger puts it, 'Being a reporter isn't all that much fun . . . you can go ahead and do the legwork for us' (Ringnalda, 2003).

Treatment

The treatment stage in journalism involves decision-making about specific stories, layout, programming production, etc. and the execution of these decisions. In this stage, occupations are most vulnerable to the efficacy of their treatments. Certainly the frequency of journalists' treatment failures provides bloggers with a great deal of ammunition. The litany of recent high-profile errors has been the topic of numerous articles, professional conventions and workshops, both in the industry, the academy and in the blogging community. Strategies for increasing treatment efficacy have been spawned by these professional meetings, including increasing the use of ombudsmen and standardizing correction policies.

Of course bloggers frequently get it wrong too, and bloggers have reacted to criticism through a number of strategies: by acknowledging the need for standardized editing procedures; by explaining that accuracy is not reached immediately, but rather over time via the blogging network; and by rejecting the importance of accuracy and by embracing the 'enormous freedom to . . . present yourself precisely as you want to, however sloppily or irrationally or erratically', (Lasica, 2005). These strategies represent a reshaping of the subjective qualities of the logic of the blogging task.

Another strategy for maintaining control is to directly seize a treatment area from a rival. The movement by journalism organizations to produce blog-like content is an example, as is the hiring of high-profile bloggers. The argument that blogging and journalism are not in conflict but should rather complement each other serves journalism, as does the argument that blogging is simply a journalistic tool (Park, 2004). Journalism may be attempting what Abbott calls ‘amalgamation’, whereby dominant occupational groups end a threat from a subordinate occupation by absorbing them, much as medicine successfully absorbed apothecaries, homeopaths and osteopaths (Abbott, 1988).

Conclusions: a model for further analysis

At present, journalism, as an organizationally based occupation with a relatively long tradition, has the resources, the division of labor, the formal structures of rewards and punishments, and the legal backing to maintain control over information work. Yet journalists are also vulnerable to jurisdictional encroachment by bloggers. To the extent that these vulnerabilities lead to socially beneficial change in journalistic practice, optimism over the role of blogging seems justified. Yet it is not at all clear that such reactions by journalism will serve the public.

The model in Figure 1 demonstrates these observations. External ‘objective’ constraints and benefits shape ongoing efforts by journalists to shift subjective qualities, cover vulnerabilities and maintain control over news information work. Organizational constraints lead to jurisdictional vulnerabilities. These constraints consist of:

- (1) the need to produce on a mass scale, and thereby attract large audiences and advertisers;
- (2) the need to let many stories slip through the news net;
- (3) the need for predictability and safeness; and
- (4) the need for a standardized, regularly paced production schedule.

Organizational benefits strengthen the occupation and its ability to control work. These include:

- (1) a steady, predictable stream of physical capital, which provides the incentive of compensation;
- (2) the formalization of reward systems and the formal encoding of professional norms;
- (3) advantages stemming from the division of labor, such as the ability to specialize in tasks related to diagnosis, inference (e.g. story assignment and reporting) and treatment (e.g. writing and design);
- (4) the ability to develop subgroups whose expertise matches the expertise of rival occupations; and

- (5) the ability to attract resources (revenue, information) from other powerful institutions.

Other external factors exist as well, including legal standing and technological change. The impact of legal standing, though hard to predict, is potentially a strong factor, but the impact on ability to control work has not yet been keenly felt. Technological change was a key factor in the initial development of blogging, and this factor should continue to affect the jurisdictional dispute through the development of blogging syndicates and blogging credibility rating systems.

The internal structure of the professional process also predicts vulnerability to jurisdictional encroachment, and for journalism, there are a number of problems in this structure:

- (1) the needs of the 'everyclient' are wide, and journalists have a need to restrict the range of information they consider in diagnosing these needs – they therefore tend to ignore non-official sources in favor of official sources, and they tend to give short shrift to specialized content areas in favor of covering conflict;
- (2) some problems and needs, such as audience desire for partisan coverage and the need for detailed information about specialized knowledge areas, are weakly addressed by journalists;
- (3) the inference process (connecting diagnosis with treatment) necessarily traverses the professional processes of rival occupations such as public relations and blogging;
- (4) the inference process for journalists is often routine and not highly difficult for outsiders to learn; and
- (5) it is difficult to assess and make apparent the success of journalism's treatment.

Challenges inherent in these structural aspects of the professional process and stemming from objective external factors are likely to lead to vulnerabilities such as:

- (1) a tendency to shun risky or openly partisan coverage, thereby leaving a content area vulnerable to bloggers;
- (2) a tendency to abandon stories that have received limited coverage in order to address new, fresh stories, thereby feeding these topics to bloggers;
- (3) a tendency to favor information from officials, thereby allowing blogs to become the voice of the 'non-elite', and increasing the cultural gap between journalists and audiences; and
- (4) a difficulty addressing specialized and complex content areas in a way that audiences can judge to be successful.

The blogging community itself does not increase or decrease the intrinsic vulnerabilities of journalism. However, because bloggers exist as a rival, vulnerabilities become salient to the occupation, and journalists are more likely to reconstruct and redefine the practice and processes of journalism in order to protect the occupation.

Journalists are likely to deal with these vulnerabilities by engaging in intra-professional discussion through conventions, trade publications and

online forums. Recent discussions on the blogging challenge have been prolific. As the model shows, these discussions represent an effort by journalists to realign the subjective aspects of the diagnosis–inference–treatment process – i.e. to redefine problems, audience and goals.

Strategies for addressing the blogging challenge have already become evident. Journalism organizations have begun to offer blogs on their Web sites. Online journalists for news organizations have been publicly vocal about the need to append blogging to journalism, or to adopt it as a news-gathering and fact-checking tool. Civic journalism efforts, the adoption of ombudsmen, and the growing use of non-elite sources are likely in part a response to the challenge of online personal publishing, though certainly these efforts were underway earlier.

As the model shows, the impact of these strategies feeds back to reshape the professional process. Vulnerabilities may be repaired by, for example, increasing use of non-elite sources, or by making blogs a mainstay of journalistic practice. Problems and goals can be redefined in order to make vulnerabilities irrelevant. The journalism community may try to redefine blogging as a journalistic tool, and bloggers as amateur journalists or journalism wannabes (rather than as a unique occupation). Journalists also publicly emphasize practices that play to the strengths of organizationally based journalism, such as newsgathering and fact checking.

Are these strategies likely to benefit society? Supporters of blogging in the online journalism community typically herald adoption of the blogging form and the monitoring of blogging content as evidence of a new participatory, more egalitarian journalism (Lasica, 2002a). Yet it is not at all clear that news staff blogs are very participatory, given recent evidence that journalism bloggers tend to link mainly to each other (Singer, 2005).

News organizations may be more interested in containing and directing the blogging phenomenon than in fostering democratic participation. It is unlikely that the content of organizationally sanctioned blogs will have much bite to them, given resource needs and legal concerns. And partial co-optation of blogging by journalism would reduce the conflict between bloggers and journalists, thereby scratching the annoying itch that might otherwise lead to beneficial social change.

Journalists might react to the blogging challenge by changing professional practice so that, for example, substantially more non-elite sources are used, or so that more partisan coverage is provided. Yet the constraints of organizational and community dependency structures makes these changes unlikely, at least in the short term.

One socially beneficial reaction to blogging has been to strengthen journalists' claims over the tasks of gathering news and ensuring accuracy. Journalists have the resources to conduct these tasks in a thorough, consistent way –

most bloggers do not. Recent rhetoric by journalists shows they recognize these advantages. Increased recognition of the importance of these tasks could benefit audiences and society.

Likewise, the blogging phenomenon has made it more obvious that journalists tend to drop stories prematurely and move to fresh topics. Were news organizations to increase specialized expertise and cover stories more thoroughly, audiences would benefit. It is more likely that news organizations will try to repair these vulnerabilities on the cheap by encouraging journalists to monitor blogs, tap the specialized expertise of the blogosphere, and track stories that have staying power with audiences.

It is possible to test these speculations through empirical study. A number of research questions may be posed, and are in fact suggested by the model:

To what extent are journalism organizations adopting blog formats and why? Do these formats represent fundamental shifts in relationships with audiences or are they largely window dressing? To what degree are journalism organizations moving toward partisan coverage or use of non-elite sources, and why? To what degree does pressure from bloggers contribute to these changes?

The model suggests a variety of external and internal factors will influence news organizations' decisions about blogging. One such factor is integration with external institutions such as sources and advertisers. The more dependent news organizations are on powerful community institutions, the more these institutions shape the process of diagnosis, inference and treatment. As mentioned, journalism organizations that mimic blogging by using more non-elite sources may jeopardize their own standing within this community power structure and make the flow of incoming resources less predictable.

What is the impact of the structural complexity of a news organization's environment on professional practice related to the blogging challenge?

Degree of competition with other journalism organizations should also have an influence. Intense competition increases uncertainty, and uncertainty tends to lead to consideration of change. It may be that mild competition would lead to superficial attempts to embrace blogging, whereas intense competition would open the door to more fundamental change.

What is the impact of level of media competition on professional practice related to the blogging challenge?

As the model suggests, organizational size and structure is an important predictor. Larger news organizations have the resources and connections to stave off the blogging challenge, and they may be likely to do so by pursuing new online story forms, increasing specialization, hiring bloggers, etc.

What is the impact of organizational size and resources on professional practices related to the blogging challenge?

According to the model, occupations repair themselves by re-examining the occupational knowledge base in intra-professional discussions. Level of

professional involvement should therefore have an impact on the altering of professional practice.

What impact does level of professional involvement have on changes in professional practice?

Also at the occupational level, the existence of rivals can reshape the internal dynamics of an occupation. Certain subgroups within an occupation may better handle a rival's challenge than other subgroups. These subgroups may therefore gain clout in relation to others.

What is the impact of blogging on the relationship among internal segments of the journalism occupation?

The model is especially helpful for understanding when change by the journalism occupation (or any occupation) is likely to be meaningful, and when such change is likely to be window dressing. When analysis reveals an occupation to be well entrenched and without a significant rival, no changes in professional practice are likely. When an occupation is well entrenched but vulnerable to rivals in some areas – as with journalism – fundamental change is not likely in the short term, but change in the window dressing is likely. When an occupation is not well entrenched and is highly vulnerable, fundamental change is more likely.

It will be interesting to see if blogging remains a challenge to journalism, or if journalism will find a way to address vulnerabilities and strengthen its control over news information work. The future is unclear. What seems clear, is that journalism as an occupation will experience incremental change in the short term, by adapting through co-optation or subtle redefinition. Such efforts may succeed or fail in maintaining journalistic control – and could even fundamentally change the nature of mainstream journalism.

Notes

- 1 A number of discursive studies have explored alternatives to journalism and the struggle over symbolic power at journalism's edges (Dooley, 1999; Downing et al., 2001). The present study takes a different approach, focusing on the impact of social structures in shaping these struggles, rather than on the rearticulation of practices, norms and values (Matheson, 2004).
- 2 It is also not clear that the network analogy fits only blogging. It could be argued that a 'legacysphere' (Reynolds, 2004) exists as well, where journalists share news through wire services and make corrections via a network.
- 3 A number of studies have attempted to assess whether journalism is a profession or not. This is not an issue for this study, which takes a process perspective. As Abbott (1988) says, 'Whether journalism's inability to monopolize makes it "not a profession" is not particularly interesting. What matters is that interprofessional competition in fact shaped it decisively' (p. 225).
- 4 Many scholars from the political economy and institutional perspectives consider advertisers rather than audience to be the true clients (Golding and

- Murdock, 1997; Turow, 1997). Political economy scholars hold that audiences are commodities, obtained by media organizations and purchased by advertisers. Other scholarship has shown that news organizations have both marketing and journalism orientations, and that the impact of advertising on content is variable (Beam, 2003; McQuail, 2000). Journalism is not unique in this dual allegiance. The work of all occupations is to some degree governed by market exchange and corporate constraints, including established professions such as medicine (Beisecker and Beisecker, 1993). When journalists practice the professional logic of diagnosis–inference–treatment, it is for readers, and readers are therefore considered the client in this study. Of course it is recognized that commercial pressures influence journalists' professional logic, such as the fact that advertiser needs shape the formation of the news beat, the journalist's diagnosis category.
- 5 Recent studies show that only around 10 to 20 percent of frequent internet users even occasionally read blogs (Pew Research Center, 2005; Sands, 2004). A recent Gallup poll showed that about 7 percent of all Americans read blogs at least twice a week (CNN, 2005).

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