



Blogging: personal participation in public knowledge-building on the web

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Blogs have emerged from a humble beginning to become a highly networked mass of online knowledge and communication. All kinds of research, from searching for the best price of the latest mobile phone, to more rigorous forms, are conducted through the blog medium. The mechanisms that provide the possibility for blogs to link to each other provide possibilities for collaboration and knowledge sharing in a fast, public and convenient manner. This working paper discusses the lessons that can be learned from collaboration and research in the blogosphere with a view to how they can be applied to academic and commercial research.

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1 Introduction to weblogs

From a humble beginning as 'What's New' pages, blogs have arisen to become arguably the most popular online personal publishing platform on the internet. Over the last few years blogs have come to the fore appearing not only in the news media but also in search engine results pages.

Blogs (also known as web logs, or weblogs) are web sites that contain frequently updated 'posts' with the most recent entry at the top of the page and the previous ones displayed reverse-chronologically. The type of information contained within a blog varies greatly from individual to individual. Authors of blogs (known as bloggers) can describe day-to-day observations in their lives, or more specific topics of interest to them, such as web design or cycling. Some frequently visited blogs are topic related (e.g. <http://www.instupundit.com>, one of the most visited blogs). Some mix this in with personal events in the author's life (e.g. www.kottke.org, another popular blog), such as going on holiday or meeting new people.

Since blogs are web sites, they are controlled and navigated using hyperlinks, and posts typically incorporate hyperlinks to other blogs or news sources, together with related comments and discussions. When blogs start linking to each other and commenting on what has been said, huge, distributed discussions can erupt that include many different bloggers, and concern many different topics.

2 Snapshot of blog format

Blogs appear in many shapes and sizes. The design is at the author's discretion, much like a typical webpage. Nevertheless, the majority of blogs converge on a simple layout of a title banner at the top of the page, a 'side bar' at the left or right of the page with the 'posting area' featuring the main content taking up the remainder of the page (Fig.1).

Figure 1: Typical layout of a blog

Possibly the most varied and idiosyncratic area of the three, the side bar, is an eclectic mix of links and information related to the blog and its author. Typical features of the side bar include a 'blogroll' or list of links to other blogs, an archive of past posts in date order (which can go back a number of years) and information about the author, not dissimilar to an 'About' page on a personal web site. However, the side bar often displays many other types of information besides the few examples given here, a symptom of the diversity present in the blog community (collectively known as the 'blogosphere').

Blogs are created using the same language as web pages and therefore they inherit the properties of a web page. As a result of this, blogs are cross-modal in that they can display not only text, but also images (most commonly in the form of digital photographs), audio and video.

It is also possible for a blog to have more than one author, sometimes known as collaborative blogs. A single blog, therefore, can incorporate the writings of many people, usually with each post having a signature at the end designating the author. These types of blog are popular among families and organisations, although they also have many other uses. The ease with which blogs can be set up means that they are ideal for ephemeral events such as conferences allowing many different people to publish information rather than a single individual being responsible for all the information.

To illustrate the format further, Figure 2 shows a screenshot from a blog called Chocolate N' Vodka. Note the ordering of the posts according to time, also links within the posts to other web sites and blogs.

Figure 2: Screenshot from the Chocolate N' Vodka blog showing 3 posts (from chocnvodka.blogware.com, a blog by Suw Charman which has been running since 2003, reproduced by kind permission of Suw Charman). [1] shows date that the post was written. [2] title of post, author's name and exact date and time when post was created. [3] comments and permalink (described here in full as 'Permanent Link', see below). [4] reference and link to a post on another blog. Words underlined are hyperlinks..

3 Brief history of the blog

It is difficult to judge the exact moment when blogs came into existence since there is some debate about when a personal homepage becomes a blog. Blogging does not seem to have been invented by any one person or organisation (certainly not part of university research or designed initially as a research tool); rather it has emerged due to a series of events brought about by many people. In 1993 Mosaic, the nascent web browser company, published a page on its web site called 'What's New' (Blood 2003). This listed and linked to new sites on the web that users of the browser could visit. With the world wide web blossoming, more people soon took the cue to produce links to new and interesting sites found while surfing the web, and publish them on their own personal homepages. As this style of web page became more popular, it became apparent that a name was needed to differentiate them from other web pages. Jorn Barger, a writer, was the first person to use the term 'web log' in 1997. During the early summer of 1999, Peter Merholz, a user interface consultant and web designer, used the term 'wee blog' on his weblog, which soon became truncated to just 'blog'.

These first sites were edited by hand in HTML (hypertext mark-up language) and then uploaded to a web server manually. They were thus perhaps technically closer to our concept of a personal homepage, although the typical 'link and comment' pattern seen in blogs today was present. As there are virtually no distinguishing features of a blog to determine it from a normal webpage, other than layout, it is almost impossible to know the number of blogs in these early stages. Even now it is difficult to know the number of active blogs in existence. However, one can assume that between 1993 and 1999 the numbers were very small, most being authored by those with an interest in various aspects of information technology.

It was not until 1999 that a number of companies emerged to produce software that allowed blogs to be created and updated very easily. This allowed people with previously little or no knowledge about HTML and the internet to begin producing their own blogs. The move towards making the medium more accessible spurred a growth in the number of bloggers, and therefore the diversity of blogs.

The features of blogging that make it stand out as a unique medium also allow it to be seen as a step in the mass 'amateurisation' of publishing (Coates 2003a). Before the age of the internet it was theoretically possible for everyone to publish material that was accessible to anyone who could read and afford a newspaper. However, the decision to publish was at the discretion of an editor and it largely depended on literacy skills, social class and luck whether your contribution was selected from the thousands of others sent to the newspaper or magazine.

With the advent of the internet, publishing 'one-to-many' became infinitely easier. Anyone with a computer and internet connection could publish their own material allowing anyone else with the necessary equipment to read it. In the early days of the internet, this was limited to those with the money to spend on the equipment and the knowledge to set it up. As electronics prices dropped, the number of people able to publish increased, yet there was still no easy way to quickly create webpages and frequently update them without dealing with files and downloading programs onto the computer.

Finally, blogs appeared. A company called Pitas launched a new web service which provided the ability to simply visit a web site, sign up and publish a blog within minutes. Updating a blog became as easy as clicking a button. The increasing pervasiveness of the internet in the home, workplace and in public areas provided practically anyone with the ability to publish.

4 Blogging as public space for distributed knowledge-building

Since the first appearance of what we now recognise as the blog, there has been a move towards it becoming a far more contributive medium. In particular, three additions to the blog have had far-reaching effects in the way that the blog community operates; permalinks (permanent links), comments and trackback. Indeed, the fact that the blog community or 'blogosphere' is a community is owed largely to these innovations (none are 100 per cent ubiquitous throughout the blogosphere, however, suggesting it is still evolving). Permalinks point to individual blog posts, comments enable readers to feedback about an individual post, and trackback is a citation notification system – simple changes in terms of program development but with far broader social, collaborative effects.

Permalinks, usually found at the end of a blog posting, provide a permanent link to that post. Following the permalink from another web page will link back to the blog, providing the post with its own page, together with its associated comments and trackbacks. The ability to point to specific posts, rather than to a blog as a whole, provides a landscape for conversations whereby specific references can be made to comments by a blogger. Furthermore, permalinks provide an increased incentive to link between blogs and posts, building up a huge networked conversation.

Permalinks have the added benefit of furnishing a blog with a memory (Coates 2003b). Clearly there is a limit to the amount of information that can be displayed on the front page before it becomes unmanageable and too hefty to download. Instead of posts 'dropping off' the bottom of the page and ceasing to exist, permalinks allow posts to be archived and referenced even when they are not displayed on the front page, providing the content with longevity. By allowing other bloggers to point to individual posts, the permalink effectively breaks down the blog home page into a finer grain of many posts. This allows the post to be treated as a unit in its own right – a kind of archive - and therefore allows the implementation of comments and trackback.

Typically located at the end of a post, comments allow other users to directly leave feedback about the attached post. The comments are viewable by everyone reading the blog thus opening a direct route of contact with the author as well as the blog's audience and helping to increase the immediacy of the conversational element of blogs. Since they are readable by anyone reading the blog and anyone can leave feedback, they are also a way of allowing readers (who do not need to author their own blog) to communicate with each other with the blog post as the topic of discussion, potentially creating ties between readers. Comments also help to increase a feeling of others' presence so it can be seen which blogs are more popular as well as which posts generate more discussion.

Trackback is a more recent addition, again usually found at the bottom of a blog post. Trackback is like a citation alert mechanism, allowing blogger A to inform blogger B that blogger B is being referenced by blogger A. For example, Dan reads a post on Lara's blog and decides to write his own post about it on his blog. So he publishes his thoughts and since they both use the trackback system, Lara is informed that Dan has just written about her. Unlike linking with a permalink, whereby the person being linked to is unaware, trackback is a visible two-way bridge between two blogs. This permanent bridge-building encourages links between blogs and increases the social networking that helps to enlarge and maintain communities.

The above three components of blogs together contribute greatly to the mechanism with which the blogosphere is maintained and becomes a networked mass of linked people and information. So far I have described the way that these components promote communication and feedback between individual blogs. Now let us stand back a level and look at the overall effect that this has upon the information that passes along the links and nodes of the networked blogosphere.

Because blogs are public and allow for dynamic interaction, active collaboration and sharing are made possible. This allows ideas and knowledge to become transparent and easily transferable across disciplines, and to many diverse sets of people. Certain ideas are not picked up or noticed, while others become popular and spread rapidly throughout the blogosphere. Linking from one blog to another using a permalink or trackback supports the easy and often rapid creation of associations between ideas.

Further, again because blogs are public, web services as well as individuals can tap into their power to develop interesting uses. One such service is 'All Consuming' (allconsuming.net). This searches recently updated blogs every hour for links to books on well known web sites such as Amazon. All Consuming makes an assumption that when a blogger links to a book on one of these sites, it will be accompanied by some meaningful text about that book. These blog entries are then associated with the book on the service's web site. The site thus becomes a place where people can research purchasing a book by

reading people's blog entries to see what they say about it - an online community-built book reviewing system that works by pooling particular types of information from blogs.

A sudden rise in the number of blogs as well as interest in them occurred shortly after September 11th 2001 when the World Trade Centre in New York became a victim of terrorism. Blogs furnished ordinary people with the ability to publicly display their shock and disgust at the tragedy. The ability to cross-link between blogs paved the way for discussion, as a method of trying to understand and deal with what had happened. Blog communities provided an emotional support mechanism.

Although at first the social side of blogging was not apparent, the introduction of permalinks, comments and trackback has contributed greatly to its popularity. It could be argued that it is the connective and contributive attributes of blogging that has caused it to spread so virally throughout the web, and in turn define blogging as the inherent differentiator from personal homepages (Marlow 2004). A recent study reports that 27% of American internet users read blogs in 2004, a 58% increase on the previous year (Pew Internet 2005).

Anderson comments in this volume that research can be seen as something occurring among the public, outside of university walls. As described above, one of the first uses for blogs was to point readers to places of interest on the web. That use has not changed to the present day, and blogs are used as filters whereby collections of information about a single topic can be shown, omitting often irrelevant information. For example, one blog entry explains some of the scientific background to a science fiction film, linking to relevant articles and discussions on the web for further reading and clarification. Another blog with a focus on the Middle East brought together several articles from US, UK, Japanese and New Zealand news sources. When people use the internet to research particular topics, such repositories are useful stopping places, providing for the accessible accumulation and synthesis of knowledge that are important dimensions of research.

Blogging is about sharing. The act of blogging makes information public through publishing online. The public information is then available for viewing by anyone with internet access. Many bloggers are experts within a particular field; they research a subject and use their blogs to publish and distribute their acquired knowledge about the subject area. This information is then free to view, allowing others to learn and add to their own knowledge. It is common for such bloggers to provide links to articles and papers supporting their claims, enabling readers to verify the sources.

When many blogs arise around a particular subject area, it is often the case that they will link to one another and begin discussions. When these discussions form around the task of reaching a particular goal, formed communities can work towards its achievement through group research and collaboration. Although blogs were never designed for this purpose (it could be argued that blogs were never 'designed' at all), the functionality of a blog lends itself very well to such spontaneous creation of community (shared documents carrying information, it has been suggested (Brown and Duguid 2002), can foster community, providing social glue). The citation notification mechanism of trackback makes it possible to track conversations and trace arguments across many blogs, forming links and therefore networks of blogs and bloggers. This, in turn, provides a platform for collaboration, and resources for research and accumulation of knowledge. A recent report claims that 12% of American internet users have made use of these 'interactive' features on blogs (Pew Internet 2004).

A trend is emerging of many new blogs, and in turn blog communities, appearing around global events. As noted earlier, this first became noticeable around the 9/11 tragedy when many people found blogs a useful means of sharing their thoughts. The subsequent war in Iraq sparked a new wave of blogs, as did the 2004 US presidential election. The contentious issue of whether the war was justified or not, as well as the many arising issues surrounding the war and the election, provided fodder for many inter-blog discussions around which communities arose. The interesting phenomenon here is that these communities appeared in a self-organising way, without direction from a central controlling figure.

A famous example of how blogs can quickly form communities and achieve goals is the role of blogs in the controversy surrounding George W. Bush's military service. An American TV news network produced memos suggesting that Bush received preferential treatment in his national service. Only a few hours after the report was broadcast thousands of bloggers were discussing claims that the documents were forgeries, despite the White House at first seeming to bow to the original news story. Some of these bloggers were ex-military personnel from the time of the president's experience in the armed forces. They provided information about the format of military documents in 1972, suggesting that the Bush memos did not conform to this. Others were typographic experts who provided strong evidence suggesting the documents were produced using a modern word processing program and not a typewriter

in 1972, as claimed by the news story. Following much public and media interest, bloggers started discussing, and drawing attention to a Dallas newspaper report about the secretary of the man responsible for releasing the memos who suggested that they were forged. The result was that the TV news network admitted they could not prove authenticity, and the news reporter was forced to formally apologise for reporting on an unsubstantiated story. This shows how blogs can mobilise and respond incredibly rapidly en masse around a topic to contribute and form new knowledge towards a common goal collaboratively. In this example experts combined their knowledge to arrive at a goal (providing evidence suggesting the memos were fakes and discrediting the news story).

Finding blogs relevant to a popular topic of interest is not a difficult task. This is because they tend to rank highly in search engine results pages. Web sites that have many incoming links and are updated frequently have a propensity to be favoured by search engines (owing to the algorithms used by search engines), causing blogs to frequently appear in the top search results. Due to this phenomenon people interested in the war in Iraq were able to easily find blogs with that theme.

Another aspect that facilitates the creation of communities is the way that blogs can act as collections of links surrounding a particular theme. One 'war blogger' may publish a post about an aspect of the Iraq war, including several links to other blogs from around the blogosphere in her post. Her post can then be linked to by many other bloggers interested in her topic. The links that she has included in her post may then be re-used by many others in their posts. Each wave of this cycle can bring together huge numbers of blogs into discussions. Salam Pax (otherwise known as the 'Baghdad Blogger') was the subject of this type of propagation of links and information. He was a civilian who was living in Baghdad throughout the invasion of Iraq and had his blog recognised and linked to by many other blogs interested in the first-hand accounts he was able to provide. Eventually the links became so prevalent throughout the blogosphere that journalists discovered the blog and the author became a media celebrity. Another instance was an influential blogger reporting on an IT consultancy company who fraudulently obtained his telephone number to sell him their wares. So many bloggers linked to his story that it affected search engine rankings, so that the blog posting appeared in search results above the company's own web site (Slate Magazine 2002; Haughey 2002).

Figure 3: Blog posting bringing together many different articles into a single posting (from antiwar.com/blog). The words in bold are links to other articles.

Topical blogging, such as war-blogging, illustrates how blogs can be used for knowledge creation and knowledge sharing. A blog can bring together many points of view from many different blogs and many different articles from around the web, into a single post by linking to them (for an example see Fig. 3). Comments and trackbacks allow readers of the post to contribute their own relevant links that help to support or reason against the argument. That post can then be used and combined with other posts in other blogs, and in doing so, further the argument.

This pattern is not limited to political discussions or current affairs, however. There are blogs for discussions in philosophy, for example, and a language blog where linguists collaborate to discuss and track the frequency of non-standard language usages (Economist 2005: 89). The pattern of the distributed creation and sharing of knowledge in public space can be applied equally to discussions of scientific, religious or social nature, or any other interests.

5 Controlling and motivating knowledge synthesis: a collaborative process

One of the criticisms of blogs is that they provide personal opinions of their authors; typically one individual. Certainly, one use of blogs is to vent opinions. For the everyday 'researcher' looking, for example, for advice on which product to buy, these kinds of personal views can be useful. For more traditional forms of research, however, unmediated personal opinion is to be avoided. The criticism lies in the fact that there seems no way of knowing whether any one blog entry has been properly fact-checked and that its arguments are lucid and relevant.

There are, however a large number of blogs that do foster knowledge, which helps to illustrate how people are not necessarily reluctant to share knowledge. For research in the blogosphere to meet the standards of the research within the academic community (i.e. within university walls), there needs to be a peer-review system in place. Permalinks, comments and trackback provide a mechanism for this. Blog posts can be read, linked to and commented on by other bloggers with similar interests. The public display of the information allows others to view it and comment on it. Facts are checked, arguments are analysed and sometimes countered by the readers, some of whom may be experts, as in the Bush memo forgery example.

The same phenomenon also occurs for less sensationalist issues, and it is common for entire discussions to surround a single blog post. As one blogger says:

'...it doesn't matter that I'm not an A-list blogger, [readers of the blog are] still going to call you up on it if you get it wrong, and if they know about it then you're not going to get away with it' (Suw Charman).

As suggested in the quote, it is not necessary to have a large audience in order to gain feedback about one's blog entry (an 'A-list' blogger is one that is considered to be hugely popular, with many incoming links and tens, even hundreds, of thousands of hits per day). The key audience comes from other interested bloggers and regular readers of particular blogs.

So what are the motivations that drive people to invest personal time into sharing their knowledge and taking the risk of exposing it to public assessment? Bloggers' motivations vary greatly from person to person, as one would expect. A blog can be seen as being a personal as well as a public medium and it has been argued that the success of blogging is partly due to this (Roell 2004). The benefits of blogging, therefore, can be seen as satisfying both personal and public motivations.

At a personal level, a blog is an efficient way to store and organise information. Blogs are sometimes described as 'notepads' as well as online diaries. For some bloggers, their blog is a way of keeping notes and useful URLs (web addresses) in an organised way. Blogs can sometimes be used as 'mental scratchpads', with blog posts showing where corrections have been made by digitally 'crossing out' unwanted text but still allowing it to be seen. This is a common practice amongst bloggers that also enables readers to see how the author's ideas have changed. Many bloggers categorise each post as they publish it, allowing all posts of a particular category to be viewed at once. Recent software announcements have marked the beginning of a desktop search software war, with statements declaring that currently it is 'easier to search 6 billion documents on the internet than it [is] to find a single file on your hard drive' (Washington Post 2004). Since blogs are archived by search engines, bloggers can take advantage of their intelligent search algorithms, making it easier to find past blog entries, and creating an attractive way to store and retrieve information.

Bloggers can also link to posts from other blogs, connecting their own ideas with those of others. In fact, this very connection of knowledge can enable creation of new knowledge (Roell 2004):

'...you're trying to synthesise an original viewpoint from the different angles that you've read...' (Suw Charman).

Blogging can simply be about people researching and writing about a subject that interests them. Although bloggers do research in order to write a post, that research is not considered a chore, but rather a pleasure.

'...it's really just like anyone else would sit down in front of the television evening news, it's just me out of interest looking at stuff...' ('Matthew', blogging since 2000).

The reward for doing this is the cognition that it encourages, allowing new thoughts to develop.

'...the more I write, the more I think about stuff...' (Suw Charman)

'...sometimes having started [to write] a weblog post, I think in order to finish it, I need to look at least at stuff that I might not have otherwise looked at.' ('Matthew').

The second set of motivations lies in the public nature of blogging. The connectivity of the blogosphere nurtures incentives to keep blogging, such as popularity. The blogosphere can be seen as a playground, populated by millions of blogs. Many bloggers strive to travel further toward the top of the lists of the most-read blogs, towards the top of the 'power curve' (Barabasi 2002, Shirky 2003).

'...I felt that people were expecting content and that in order to me to crawl up the power curve, I had to keep producing content...' (Suw Charman).

Popularity in this sense can be seen as having a large readership, monitored by site meters which count the number of times a page is sent from a web server to another computer. It is common to see links on a blog to web pages displaying this information, allowing anyone who visits the blog to view it.

Another, perhaps more revealing, metric for judging popularity is the number of incoming links a blog receives. The assumption is that if someone is linking to a blog, then it is an endorsement. Clearly this may not always be the case, for instance if someone links to a blog in the context of describing how bad it is. Furthermore, services tracking incoming links only track a proportion of sites on the web due to the sheer size of the web and limits of tracking technology. Therefore, although 'disapproving' links are rare, using incoming links as a measure of popularity is not entirely accurate. Links seem to be more common when pointing to something of interest, or to support or disprove an argument. Many services have arisen around this metric, ranking sites based on their incoming links. As with the site meters mentioned earlier, bloggers sometimes put links on their sites to these services so others can see how they are faring in the blogosphere rankings. From the point of view of the blogger, the more links that point to their blog, the more channels there are directing people to visit, thus increasing the potential for readership.

Nevertheless there is a deeper motivation in clamouring for audience and links. Larger numbers of visitors bring with them a higher chance of comments and feedback, providing social interaction and the potential for transfer of knowledge. More prominence leads to increased social capital and access to knowledge.

'...if you get something wrong, or people disagree with you, they will tell you...they will blog about it and go, you know, [you've] got this completely wrong, and then that's useful in itself because it's a point of view I haven't thought of...' (Suw Charman).

This public collaborative aspect of blogging has something in common with certain other web developments. A similar, new technology to the blog that is closer to the centre of the debate on the authority of un-mediated media is the wiki, and in particular Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org). A wiki is a web-based system that allows people to create large numbers of linked web pages very quickly and easily. Wikipedia is essentially an online encyclopaedia that is created and edited by anyone and everyone. The way that it works and provides useful information is that there are so many people who find it useful that they add data to it and correct information when it is found to be incorrect.

The system works under the same approach as the open source programming that has become so documented recently. This made its major impact with Linux, an operating system to rival Microsoft's Windows operating system. The difference between the two systems is that Linux was produced by a mass of completely undirected, unpaid and independent programmers, whereas Windows was produced by a central software house, collectively pumping millions of dollars into the project. The developers who produced Linux did it entirely in their spare time and at no cost. Linux is in wide use across the globe.

Research in the realm of the blog as well as the wiki is akin to this open source programming. Less serious uses of blogs have also been made such as collaborative treasure hunts, but nevertheless show ways in which they can be put to use in real world situations (Lester 2003). Users with a personal interest in a technology can collectively and collaboratively, in a distributed and largely undirected environment, provide useful public resources.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how blogs can enable people to engage in the knowledge society. Blogs are not limited to use by professional researchers, but can also be used by ordinary people conducting more everyday research. This is aided by an important feature of blogs: their accessible and public nature. Bloggers' willingness to share and connect information works towards creating a mass of experts and novices where all benefit.

Larger organisations, such as All Consuming, also help to make connections, pooling information found in blogs to make useful resources for research. Although blogs are a distributed medium, services that take advantage of the diversity of the blogosphere can forage for information and collate it into meaningful repositories. These links that services as well as individual people form between blogs help to create a network that allows information to spread rapidly and virally. The diversity in the blogosphere also plays a key role in allowing ideas to spread into new domains. The links act as channels through which communication and collaboration can occur, allowing groups of bloggers to work towards a common goal.

Blogs can act as a door into the knowledge society. They enable people to accumulate knowledge as well as share and manage it. But blogs are merely tools; they are not a golden ticket into the knowledge society. Knowledge is synthesized by communication between people sharing objectives. Blogs facilitate this by making people easier to find, and providing immediate and direct communication channels once contacts have been established. Many people keep blogs and therefore there is a great variety in the kind and quality of knowledge available. Commenting and linking between posts enables visible and public feedback that can expose flaws in an argument and point to better, more accurate sources. Blogs have evolved components that better facilitate communication between readers and authors. This increased ability to communicate helps to foster collaboration between bloggers, as well as forming diverse types of community that can engage in activities such as research and problem solving. This chapter has used some current affairs examples of how bloggers achieve this by bringing resources together and sharing knowledge to jointly further their common understanding of a topic. But similar patterns of communities voluntarily working towards a common goal can be seen in other blogging topics too, as well as in the open source movement, suggesting that new tools may be encouraging a cultural shift.

Another important aspect of this chapter has been an exploration of the motivations that keep bloggers blogging. Bloggers do not merely publish information, but also use the blogosphere as a source for increasing their own knowledge and supporting or disproving their claims. We have seen that blogs can be used as notepads for exploring one's own thoughts and ideas, but also as notice boards for allowing others to contribute and to develop ideas. Blogging is a significant part of a new culture of voluntary, contributive and collaborative participation that, despite being distributed in structure, can be highly focused in organisation.

A large number of blogs, perhaps the majority, are not about research or collaboration. There is, however, an important subset (still a substantial number) that do participate in research and/or collaboration. These communities provide insights into how research can be conducted in public space without the support structures present in universities.

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Cross reference to Figure 1.



Figure 1: Typical layout of a blog

Sunday, August 1 1


 **Do video games lead to murder, as some newspapers claim, or are newspapers themselves to blame?** 2

by [Suw Charman](#) on August 1, 2004 12:40PM (BST)

[Vince](#) writes about the assertion by the Daily Mail that the game Manhunt lead a 17 year old boy to murder his schoolmate. He disagrees, and posits instead that if any external influence was involved, it would be more likely to be that of the Daily Mail itself. Start with [this post](#) and then read the following two.

[Leave Comment](#) | [Permanent Link](#) | [Cosmos](#)


Saturday, July 31

 **"This movie is to climate science as Frankenstein is to heart transplant surgery."**

by [Suw Charman](#) on July 31, 2004 11:00PM (BST)

Quite possibly [the best review](#) of [The Day After Tomorrow](#) that I have read so far. Via [Kottke](#). 4

[Comments \(1\)](#) | [Permanent Link](#) 3 [amos](#)

 **One-handed splinter extraction advice required**

by [Suw Charman](#) on July 31, 2004 04:56PM (BST)

One of the drawbacks of living on one's own is lack of extra hands. I have just managed to skewer myself with three large chunks of 2x4, and one small one. (Before you ask, I was ferreting about in the loft, looking for my years old INXS tapes (and before you ask about *that*, it was just a sudden urge, ok?) when I overbalanced and unwisely grabbed at a rafter.)

Figure 2: Screenshot from the Chocolate N' Vodka blog showing 3 posts (provided by kind permission of Suw Charman). [1] shows date that the post was written. [2] Title of post, author's name and exact date and time when post was created. [3] comments and permalink (described here in full as 'Permanent Link', see below). [4] Reference and link to a post on

another blog. Words underlined are hyperlinks. From chocnvodka.blogware.com, a blog by Suw Charman which has been running since 2003.

Politically Correct Interventionism

The first black female Secretary of State testified yesterday at her confirmation hearing that we now have an adjunct to the infamous "Axis of Evil" -- the **Outposts of Tyranny**:

"To be sure, in our world there remain outposts of tyranny and America stands with oppressed people on every continent ... in Cuba, and Burma (Myanmar), and North Korea, and Iran, and Belarus, and Zimbabwe."

You'll note that this new grouping of targets is geographically and ethnically diverse: a multicultural rainbow coalition of bad guys. Cuba -- Hispanic. Burma -- Asian. Belarus -- European. Zimbabwe -- African. Iran and North Korea are thrown in as reminders..

But this is an encouraging development: **she left out Russia**. Although I'm sure that was just an **oversight**, to be corrected **shortly**.

Blog posting bringing together many different articles into a single posting (the words in bold are links to other articles) (*From antiwar.com/blog*)

Normal text¹. Cross reference to **Error! Reference source not found.**

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¹ This is a footnote.

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