



# When blogs become organizations

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## Abstract

This study first examines the degree to which public interest bloggers are adopting organizational forms and processes as they pursue heightened popularity, status, and advertising revenue. The study also examines the relationship between organizational form and formality of content; relationships between pursuit of revenue, organizational form and level of popularity are also assessed. Informed by classic organizational theory, the study involves an analysis of 151 public issue blogs. Most blogs demonstrated aspects of organizational form by adopting rules and policies, employing staff, and pursuing revenue. Pursuit of revenue corresponds with popularity in the blogosphere as well as with frequency of posting. Pursuit of revenue also correlates positively with organizational form, which in turn correlates positively with traditional journalistic practices such as primary source reporting, source balance, and fact-based rather than opinion-based reporting.

## Keywords

blogging, emerging media, media economics, news organizations, routines

Bloggers have traditionally viewed themselves as the scrappy, snarky underdogs of public interest media, challenging claims by mainstream journalists and their organizations (Copeland, 2003; Matheson, 2004), unfettered by institutional trappings (Lowrey, 2006), unencumbered by bureaucratic constraints, and uncorrupted by dependency on revenue

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(Lowrey and Latta, 2008; Perlmutter, 2008; Rettberg, 2008). As one blogger put it: 'The day [my blog] becomes a real business that focuses on profit first is the day the site will probably start to suck' (Kottke, cited in Rettberg, 2008: 137). Bloggers have touted their personal 'authenticity' as a source of their credibility, which, according to some, makes up for a lack of resources for news gathering and weak connections to official decision-makers (Matheson, 2004; Rettberg, 2008; Wall, 2005). According to this argument, free production and dissemination translates to independence (Rettberg, 2008), which encourages new perspectives from society's margins, potentially (though not necessarily) enriching public discussion.

Yet, a yearning for heightened popularity and status, and for advertising revenue, has been evident in the blogging community for some time. This is particularly true of 'public interest' bloggers, at issue in the present study. These bloggers commonly contribute information and/or commentary about issues and events in the 'public sphere' rather than merely about personal topics; such content often falls within categories traditionally typified as news by legacy news media and by a news consuming public. Blogging presents some measure of occupational-level competition to journalists, as bloggers encroach into traditional areas of professional journalistic jurisdiction and take small steps toward a professional ethic (Lowrey, 2006). They have gained the attention of journalists in the process (Lowrey and Mackay, 2008). Public interest bloggers try to position themselves as legitimate within journalistic communities, and as superior within the blogging community (Trammel and Keshelashvili, 2005), as 'he or she who gets the most links wins in the world of weblogging' (Powers, 2003). Interest in attracting more readers is increasing, and most public interest blogs now carry advertising. A quick Google search on 'advertising' and 'blogs' yields pages and pages of sites offering advice for gaining traffic and advertising, and entire conferences focus on strategies for 'monetizing' blogs.

Might such pursuit of status, audience, and revenue correlate with a mainstreaming of content, and shedding of ideology and personality? Scott (2007) suggests this could be the case: 'One can easily see potential slippage of bloggers from scrappy, upstart challengers to apparatchik pawns ...' (2007:52). According to blogger Matthew Buckland (2008), a common lifecycle for a blogger is to move from hobby to business, and to eventually 'adopt a tone of corporate civility' far from the 'gutsy, independent, grassroots startups they once were' (2008).

Bloggers have developed routines, norms, and even formal rules that apply to individual sites as well as to the larger blogging community (Lowrey and Latta, 2008; Schmidt, 2007). As Schmidt suggests, bloggers too are bound by constraints of revenue and production structures, though most analyses of blogs have focused on bloggers' rebellious independence or challenge to mainstream journalism. In addition, increased revenue allows bloggers the luxury of hiring staff, and there is evidence that many of the top, or 'A-list', bloggers, are doing just that (e.g. Kurtz, 2009; Sussman, 2009b). As Buckland (2008) says, 'some of the bigger bloggers just aren't the one-man-bands they used to be, but have hired crews to write under them'. The ability to divide labor facilitates standardized processes, allowing more careful editing, more reliable gathering of information, and more regular dissemination.

Regularity of revenue income and dissemination, differentiation of labor, and existence of formal rules are all aspects of bureaucracy, a concept that seems worlds away

from the blogosphere. And so, this leads to an unlikely question: Are some blogs becoming organizations? Or, more precisely, to what degree are blogs adopting aspects of the bureaucratic ideal type? As will be discussed, organized efforts may be placed along a continuum or 'degree of bureaucracy'. Of course this is not to propose that blogs are bureaucracies - only that traces of bureaucratic characteristics may be evident.

While some scholars have argued that digital, networked systems are the social structure of the future, and that we live in a networked, 'horizontal' and 'post-bureaucratic' society (Castells, 1996: 164; Child and McGrath, 2001), others argue that the bureaucratic form will persist (Perrow, 1986), and that flat, networked forms are likely to bend toward hierarchy (e.g. Grey and Garsten, 2001; Hodgson, 2004). It is the position here that the bureaucratic form - Max Weber's 'iron cage' - is not disappearing any time soon. Discussion of bureaucracy often takes a normative tone; no doubt, bureaucratic processes can be maddening, cold and impersonal, and bureaucracy is certainly an instrument of control. But as an ideal type, bureaucracy enables large-scale production processes that take advantage of economies of scale (Michels, 2008[1915]; Pickard, 2006) and its impersonal processes discourage irrational favoritism (Perrow, 1986). Either way, our daily lives are inextricably linked with bureaucracy.

The consequences of adopting organizational form are also explored in this article. As blogs gain staff, revenue and popularity and accrue public legitimacy, are bloggers likely to become cautious, more likely to adopt the language of officials? Will bloggers be less willing to take risks in content and rhetoric, and more willing to subdue the personal? Conversely, will bloggers be more likely to begin grounding their postings in actual reporting, and will bloggers be more likely to offer viewpoints that conflict with their own? This exploratory study seeks to answer these questions through a content analysis of the form and content of a sample of public interest blogs.

## Literature review

### *Who blogs and why?*

Active bloggers are still a minority of web users. As of May 2010, 14 percent of web users reported maintaining a blog (Zickhur, 2010), up from 8 percent in 2006 (Lenhart and Fox, 2006), and around a third of web users reported reading news blogs, according to a 2010 Pew Research survey (The Pew Research Center, 2010). Those who blog tend to be young (Lenhart and Fox, 2006), well-educated, affluent, technologically savvy, and male (Sussman, 2009c).

Most surveys of bloggers tend to sample both public interest and personal bloggers, and so this must be taken into account in assessing results, such as those discussed later (e.g. Technorati data<sup>1</sup>). Generally, these studies have shown that the desire for personal expression is the most frequently cited motivation across all bloggers, followed closely by a desire to share thoughts, information and expertise (Chun-Yao et al., 2007; Lenhart and Fox, 2006; Nardi et al., 2004; Sussman, 2009a). Some evidence has suggested that, over time, as bloggers acquire a wider readership, their focus changes from an internal goal of personal expression to an external goal of influencing others (Wisconsin Blog Club, 2006). Though a desire for popularity and influence shows up as a fairly strong factor in most of these studies, the motivation to make money has fallen near the bottom of most

lists (Lenhart and Fox, 2006; Smith, 2008; Sussman, 2009b; Wisconsin Blog Club, 2006). However, 'monetizing' blogs is substantially more important for part-time and full-time bloggers, who are becoming a bigger part of the blogosphere (Sussman, 2009b).

This motivation may have ranked low because of a perceived limited opportunity to make money from blogging. However, blogging is becoming more lucrative. According to Technorati's survey of bloggers, 28 percent reported making some money related to blogging in 2009, up from 10 percent in 2006 (Sussman, 2009b). Technorati's survey findings are based on self-selecting rather than random samples. Earnings in these findings have been skewed strongly toward the 'A-list' bloggers, who tends to be public interest bloggers, with the top 15 percent of blogs from Technorati's survey making 90 percent of the money in 2008 (State of the Blogosphere, 2008). A 2006 Pew Research survey found that 15 percent of bloggers said making money was an important reason for blogging, while 38 percent of respondents to Technorati's 2009 survey said they hoped to make money on blogging. Around 17 percent reported in 2009 that blogging was their primary source of income (Sussman, 2009b).

More than half of blogs had advertising in 2008, according to Technorati's self-reporting sample, and use of 'ad tags', or script placed within site code to display ads, increased 68 percent from 2008 to 2009. Bloggers who reported to Technorati that they advertised in 2009 said they earned an average of \$42,458 (Sussman, 2009b). Payments for discussing or reviewing products in postings have become more common, raising ethical questions (Rosenwald, 2010). Bloggers earned an average of \$24,000 for reviewing products and attending product-related events in 2009, and nearly three-quarters of self-employed bloggers say they blog to attract business customers. Bloggers reported investing an average of \$4,068 in their blogs in 2009 (Sussman, 2009b).

### *Networked wealth and increased stress*

Clearly, A-list bloggers and reported 'self-employed' bloggers are much more likely to gain traffic and earn revenue. And, according to social network theory, the popular blogs will keep acquiring more traffic, more links, and more wealth. Bloggers, considered 'nodes' from a network perspective, seek links with other blogs that are already well-connected and well-established, thereby gaining optimum exposure and resources (Tremayne, 2007). Those experienced at making connections in networks become better at it, and gain a reputation, thus attracting links (Powell et al., 1996). This process favors blogs that have been around for a while, and Google's search algorithms encourage this process (Rettberg, 2008). This process is similar to the evolution of organizational networks, according to organizational ecology research (Aldrich and Ruef, 2007; Baum, 2001). Older organizations gain resources and legitimacy over time, and other organizations seek connections with such organizations (Baum, 2001).

The increasing motivation to gain links, influence others, and gain revenue, coupled with a 24/7 information environment, has led to substantial stress in the daily lives of active bloggers (Perlmutter, 2008). Bloggers report feeling a strong obligation to feed their readers continually, and to accumulate incoming links (Glaser, 2003; Perlmutter, 2008), an obligation also felt by time- and resource-constrained citizen journalists (Garber, 2010). There have been anecdotal reports of bloggers falling asleep, even instances of bloggers dropping dead, due to eroded health from obsessive, non-stop blogging (Richtel,

2008). Presumably those are rare accounts. But it seems the pressures are growing, and for a variety of reasons. Bloggers for some sites are paid per post, for scoops, and for traffic they generate. Some media companies offer bloggers bonuses for traffic benchmarks, and then raise these benchmarks (Richtel, 2008). Even bloggers who are not on the A-list report feeling pressure from the public gaze. As one such blogger said: 'If I do not post every day, I feel terrible. I know people are waiting and wondering. I know they are impatient' (Lowrey and Latta, 2008: 190).

### *Can blogs become bureaucratic?*

Increased workload, heightened public attention, stronger connections with commercial and political institutions, and the brutal 24/7 information cycle all suggest top bloggers need help. The blogging environment is becoming more interrelated and complex, work processes are becoming more technically intricate, and many bloggers are moving from personal expression toward fierce competition. According to classic organizational theory, bureaucratic forms develop in such an environment:

Rational formal structure is assumed to be the most effective way to coordinate and control the complex relational networks involved in modern technical and work activities ... As markets expand, the relational networks in a given domain become more complex and differentiated, and organizations in that domain must manage more internal boundary-spanning interdependencies ... Because the need for coordination increases under these conditions, and because formally coordinated work has competitive advantages, organizations with rationalized formal structures tend to develop. (Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 2–3)

Similarly, organizational scholars have suggested four criteria for identifying when an organization develops from a 'pre-organizational' state: (1) exchange of resources with outsiders; (2) establishment of boundaries, through registration or even branding/naming of the entity; (3) mobilization of necessary resources; and (4) intentionality, or formal goals (Aldrich and Ruef, 2007; Katz and Gartner, 1988).

In his treatise on markets and centralized governments, Max Weber (1947) explains the emergence of bureaucracy and details its characteristics, including: (1) regularized, routinized processes and specific standards for output; (2) specialization of roles through a division of labor; (3) rules and regulations that bind both managers and employees, and (4) a depersonalization of roles and tasks. These aspects constitute an 'ideal type' of bureaucracy, and, empirically, they vary across social forms. No bureaucracy includes them all, or works perfectly (as most can attest) (Perrow, 1986). Weber also discusses the importance of legitimacy for the maintenance of institutions, as do more recent scholars of institutionalism and organizational ecology (e.g. Hannan and Freeman, 1989; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Organizations that appear legitimate to powerful external institutions and to the public tend to develop and thrive (Baum, 2001; Meyer and Rowan, 1977), and evidence suggests the credibility and legitimacy of blogs are rising, if slowly (Johnson and Kaye, 2009).

Blogs have shown traces of bureaucratic aspects, such as routinized practices and conventions (e.g. Lowrey and Latta, 2008; Schmidt, 2007). The amount of information a blogger could sift through each day is nearly unlimited, and so bloggers use RSS feeds to help them aggregate and filter information, and they regularly rely on bloggers with

expertise in their area, as well as close peer groups, for ready information. Conventions in visual design, navigation structure and linking have also developed, some encouraged by design programs such as Blogger and Wordpress (Schmidt, 2007). And as with most media producers, bloggers cannot really know their reader 'clients' on an individual basis, and so bloggers have formed conventional images of audiences, as online metric data (page views, etc.), or as their peer bloggers, for example (Lowrey and Latta, 2008). Also, the push to post and update blogs on a regular basis suggests some bloggers must regulate output through scheduling (Lowrey and Latta, 2008).

Some blogs are dividing labor by hiring staff. This includes staff designated for traditional reporting roles and editing (Kurtz, 2009), a phenomenon also recently seen at Wikipedia (Cohen, 2009). Staff additions are especially common among full-time bloggers, which make up about a third of those seeking to monetize (Rettberg, 2008; Sussman, 2009b). Technorati's 2009 survey of bloggers found that on average, part-time bloggers paid around \$400 for staff help in 2009, which was just slightly more than all bloggers paid for staff. The amount rises to around \$2,200 for full-time bloggers, suggesting full-time devotion and/or company backing is necessary to justify additional help. Group blogs, which aggregate multiple bloggers, are becoming more popular (Buckland, 2008; Rettberg, 2008), and some bloggers add staff after selling their blogs to large companies (Grimm, 2010). Related to this is a tendency toward internal vertical differentiation. Studies of alternative media, such as Indy news media websites (Pickard, 2006) and alternative radio stations (Eliasoph, 1997) demonstrate how even self-consciously flat, egalitarian structures begin to bend toward hierarchy, despite the democratic ideals of those involved, a common finding in the organization sciences literature (Tolbert and Hiatt, 2009). As Michels hypothesizes in his Iron Law of Oligarchy, organizational growth leads to complexity, problems of internal coordination, and eventually to bureaucratic mechanisms such as a split between labor and management in order to bring organizational control (Rettberg, 2008; Tolbert and Hiatt, 2009).

There is also evidence that bloggers are increasingly formulating formal goals, rules, and policies for their sites. While specific ethics rules are rare (Perlmutter et al., 2007), policies on etiquette, legal issues, and general site use are becoming common (Schmidt, 2007). Many of these policies reflect conventions and norms that are beginning to coalesce across the wider 'occupational community' of bloggers – though some bloggers have resisted formalization (Rettberg, 2008; Schmidt, 2007).

Lastly, the issue of regularized, impersonal output may be the most intriguing question in this study. Bloggers have discussed the matter of popular, successful blogs losing their edge and toning down their content as they acquire wealth, popularity and status (e.g. Bradshaw, 2008; Buckland, 2008; Kurtz, 2009). Technorati's 2009 survey shows that two to three times as many bloggers reported their style as 'journalistic', 'sincere', and 'expert' as reported being 'humorous', 'snarky', or 'confrontational'. And these differences were substantially greater for self-employed and corporate bloggers (Sussman, 2009b). These observations are consistent with observations by political economists that targeting a larger audience tends to lead to homogenous and careful media content (Golding and Murdock, 1997). To what extent is blogging content taking on the formality of traditional media content – in other words, to what degree is it becoming impersonal, detached, careful and official in character? And what causes this to vary?

Three possible causes have been suggested above: (1) postings becoming more formal in nature as a result of a perceived increase in the intensity of the ‘public gaze’; (2) postings becoming more formal because of a desire or need to attract advertising or ‘mobilize resources’, which leads to a perceived need to appear stable and legitimate; and (3) postings becoming more formal because of the adoption of bureaucratic regularity and depersonalization.

Three research questions are suggested:

RQ1: To what degree does the level of popularity of a blog correspond with degree of formality in the content of postings?

RQ2: To what degree does pursuit of revenue by a blog correspond with degree of formality in the content of postings?

RQ3: To what degree does degree of adoption of bureaucratic forms and practices correspond with degree of formality in the content of postings?

The term ‘bureaucratic form’ rather than ‘organizational form’ is used in this study to reflect Weber’s characteristics for the ideal type of bureaucracy. Use of the term does not suggest blogs are the complex, multi-layered, multi-divisional structures of the popular imagination; rather, it is expected that adoption of bureaucratic characteristics will be nascent and modest, in most cases.

There also should be a relationship, and perhaps indicants of a causal mechanism, among level of popularity, pursuit of ad revenue and donations, and the degree to which blogs assume aspects of the bureaucratic form.

RQ4: To what degree and in what ways do blog popularity, pursuit of revenue and degree of bureaucratic form correlate?

## Method

A content analysis of 151 blogs and 604 blog postings was conducted. Blogs were sampled from the top 3400 blogs listed on the website ‘Truth Laid Bear’. No list of a population of blogs exists (this is a moving target), but the Truth Laid Bear site has been cited as a relatively comprehensive blog list and has been used in past content analysis studies of blogs (Li and Walejko, 2008). The list includes more than 500,000 blogs, which are all registered on the site and ranked by popularity according to the number of incoming links – i.e. the number of times other blogs registered on Truth Laid Bear link to the blog – from their postings and blogrolls. This is a commonly accepted measure for blog popularity (e.g. Glaser, 2003; State of the Blogosphere, 2008). The most popular 3400 blogs from the list were stratified into quartiles by number of incoming links, and 160 blogs were randomly selected from the list: 40 were selected from blogs falling in the range of 50 to 500 incoming links, 40 were selected from the range of 501 to 1000 links, 40 were selected from the range of 1001 to 3000 links, and 40 were selected from the range of 3001 to the highest number of links (10,147). A random number generator

was used for sampling from these strata. This sampling was skewed in favor of popular blogs, as most blogs in the 'long tail' fall below 50 incoming links.

Only blogs that provided information and/or commentary related to 'public interest' topics were sampled.<sup>2</sup> Blogs produced by staff employed by news media organizations were not used, as the study focused on the development of organizational form by pre-organizational entities. When coders encountered a news media blog or a blog not related to public issues, they sampled the previous blog on the list. Nine blogs were removed from the sample because coders were unable to gather complete data.

The individual blog served as the unit of analysis. Each blog was coded once, as most blog characteristics analyzed (e.g. existence of terms of use, or listing of staff) do not change daily. The content of the most recent four postings from each site were coded. To aid reliability, coders searched for specific terms from the coding protocol by using the browser's 'Find' function to locate html text. For example, coders searched 'adv' on homepages for existence of instructions for advertisers, and they searched the pronouns 'I, me, mine or my' for evidence of first-person usage in postings. If these searches yielded no hits, pages were scanned visually. Coders determined if a found term's context was relevant to the feature sought. An initial intercoder reliability test on 20 blogs not included in the sample yielded Scott's pi coefficients of higher than 0.70 for all measures, considered acceptable for exploratory studies.

## Measures

Researchers analyzed the site home page and all major sublinks listed in a navigation bar (such as an 'About the site' link) for features related to the dependent variable, *Degree of bureaucratic form and practices* (*Degree of bureaucratic form* from here on). These features were coded as Yes = 1 and No = 0, and features were summed into an index<sup>3</sup> for *Degree of bureaucratic form* ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 2.22$ ). Bureaucratic form included two dimensions: *Formalization* and *Division of labor*. Measures of *Formalization* related to existence of rules and policies, as well as attempts to establish boundaries via formalized goals, reflecting characteristics of organizational form (e.g. Aldrich and Ruef, 2007; Katz and Gartner, 1988) and Weberian bureaucracy. Measures included the following (Yes = 1, No = 0): (1) terms of use – i.e. information on how to post to the site, and site etiquette; (2) legal policies related to site use; (3) instructions on registering for the site, and (4) a formal mission statement or written explanation of the site purpose or theme ( $M = 2.53$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ). Measures of *Division of labor* included the following (Yes = 1, No = 0): (1) a listing of regular staff for the blog; (2) list of regular writers for the blog, and (3) evidence that the roles of the staff had been specialized – i.e. evidence of formal titles ( $M = 1.28$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ).

The variable *Pursuit of revenue* (reflecting 'mobilization of resources' [Aldrich and Ruef, 2007; Katz and Gartner, 1988]) was measured by the following (Yes = 1, No = 0): (1) existence of ads on the blog's homepage; (2) existence of instructions for advertisers; and (3) existence of requests for financial donations.<sup>4</sup> These were summed into an index ( $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ).

*Popularity of blog* was measured by the number of incoming links from homepages of blogs registered on the Truth Laid Bear site ( $M = 1088.68$ ,  $SD = 1305.60$ ). Software on the Truth Laid Bear site tracks these links.



*Formality in the content of postings* – i.e. the degree to which postings resemble the impersonal, official content of traditional news media – was measured by the following (Yes = 1, No = 0): (1) use of primary sources for reporting – e.g. human sources or reports; (2) attempt at balance (the existence of at least one sentence citing a source making a claim in opposition to the blogger's claim); (3) use of first person (the pronouns I, me, mine and my were searched using the browser's find function); (4) evidence of opinionated claims by individual posting content; (5) use of obscenities (judged to be the type not regularly seen in a traditional daily newspaper); (6) existence of grammatical irregularities, whether intentional or not, judged to be the type not regularly seen in traditional daily newspapers<sup>5</sup> (items 3 through 6 were reverse coded to be consistent with items 1 and 2). For these measures, the four most recent postings were analyzed for each blog. The six measures were summed to form an index of *Formality in posting* ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ). Three of these measures – opinionated claims, primary sources, and balanced information – were used to form the subindex variable, *Reporting*, to assess impact on the degree to which bloggers reported information as opposed to opinion ( $M = 1.58$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ).

Finally, regularity of posting was also assessed as an outcome variable, as it indicates formality in output. Posting regularity was measured by counting the number of postings on the three most recent days, and then reducing this count by a third if the latest posting was at least two days old (a third is comparable to a day's worth of posting, as three days were coded). An argument may be made that all three independent variables – revenue, bureaucratic practice, and popularity – should encourage regular, frequent posting ( $M = 14.32$ ,  $SD = 19.64$ ). Revenue makes it possible to compensate bloggers' time, hire staff, and add software; regularity of output is a dimension of bureaucratic form; and popularity brings pressure from readers and other bloggers to update frequently.

## Findings

Overall, results show that the 151 public interest blogs in the sample are relatively highly formalized, in terms of written rules, policies and mission. More than 55 percent offer a formal description of the blog's purpose. Around 44 percent offer terms of service (how to post, etiquette guidelines), half provide legal terms, and nearly 70 percent give formal instructions on how to register. A surprising number of bloggers in the sample report having help. Just fewer than 40 percent of blogs sampled indicate that the blogger has additional staff, 29 percent indicate that these additional staff have particular, stated roles, and 50 percent indicate that the blog has a list of regular writers. Most blogs in the sample pursue revenue, as three of four (74.8%) have ads on the homepage, 54.3 percent offer information about how to advertise on the blog, and 44.4 percent ask for reader donations. It should be remembered that the sample is skewed toward more popular public interest blogs.

Research questions were assessed using bivariate correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis, with Blog popularity, Pursuit of revenue, and Bureaucratic form as predictors (Table 1). Regression analysis allows effects from each predictor to be controlled, to ensure, for example, that effects from popularity with other bloggers are

**Table 1.** Measures of formalization of blog postings regressed on blog popularity, pursuit of revenue and bureaucratic form

	Formality in postings (index of 6 items) ( <i>n</i> = 151)	Reporting in postings (index of 3 items) ( <i>n</i> = 151)	Regularity of posting (no. of posts in 3 most recent days) ( <i>n</i> = 151)
RQ1: Blog popularity (number of times other blogs link to the blog)	-.04 (-.04)	.08 (.08)	.55** (.56)
RQ2: Pursuit of advertising revenue index (3 items)	.24** (.22)	.05 (.05)	.16* (.19)
RQ3: Bureaucratic form index (6 items)	.05 (.05)	.20* (.19)	.08 (.10)
R-square	.06	.07	.41

Note: Standardized regression coefficients (partial correlation coefficients in parentheses). \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ . Significance testing is used here only as a conventional criterion to indicate strength of association.

not partly due to ad revenue that enables frequent posting, or that effects from pursuit of revenue are not partly attributable to the bureaucratic form that may enable the pursuit. Causal direction cannot be determined conclusively from these analyses. For example, a strong relationship between blog popularity and formalization of content could mean bloggers are stiffening up under the 'public gaze', as suggested in the literature – however, it could also be that content reflecting professionalism is bringing more incoming links. Also, because the sample is not representative of the population of all public issue blogs, traditional parametric statistics are not used. Significance testing is used here only as a conventional criterion to indicate strength of association. All 'significant' coefficients here, at the 0.01 or 0.05 levels, account for at least 4 percent of the variance, an indicant of substantial correlation.

The first research question asks to what degree blog popularity corresponds with the level of formality in postings. Neither bivariate correlation nor regression analysis revealed significant correlation between popularity and the formality index ( $r = 0.04$ ,  $\beta = -0.04$ ). As mentioned, an analysis was also conducted that included only the measures indicating that bloggers engage in reporting practices. Again, neither bivariate correlation analysis nor regression analysis showed a significant effect from degree of popularity ( $r = 0.13$ ,  $\beta = 0.08$ ). The dependent variable regularity of posting (number of postings) was very strongly related to blog popularity ( $r = 0.61$ ,  $\beta = 0.55$ ). Likely, this is partly because having more content gives other bloggers more to link to, though it may also be that pressure from the public gaze spurs productivity.

The second research question asks to what degree pursuit of revenue corresponds with formality in postings. Both bivariate correlation analysis ( $r = 0.24$ ) and regression analysis ( $\beta = 0.24$ ) reveal substantial correlations between the pursuit of revenue index and the formality of postings index. However, this is not the case for the relationship between pursuit of revenue and degree to which bloggers engage in reporting ( $r = 0.14$ ,  $\beta = 0.05$ ). It seems then, that pursuit of ad revenue is related to overall formalization in news

**Table 2.** Measures of blog popularity, bureaucratic form and pursuit of revenue regressed on one another

	Blog popularity (number of times other blogs link to the blog) ( <i>n</i> = 151)	Pursuit of advertising revenue index (3 items) ( <i>n</i> = 151)	Bureaucratic form index (6 items) ( <i>n</i> = 151)
Blog popularity (number of times other blogs link to the blog)	–	.21* (.22)	.11 (.11)
Pursuit of advertising revenue index (3 items)	.23* (.24)	–	.31** (.31)
Bureaucratic form index (6 items)	.12 (.11)	.30** (.31)	–
R-square	.08	.16	.13

Notes: Standardized regression coefficients (partial correlation coefficients in parentheses). \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ . Significance testing is used here only as a conventional criterion to indicate strength of association.

content, but neither revenue nor its pursuit has a direct effect on news gathering practices. Finally, regularity of posting was strongly related to pursuit of revenue in the bivariate analysis ( $r = 0.34$ ). The strength of the relationship drops off in the regression analysis ( $beta = 0.16$ ) but the correlation is near the conventional .20 cutoff for significance.

The third research question asks to what degree bureaucratic form corresponds with formality in postings. Bivariate analysis ( $r = 0.12$ ) and regression analysis ( $beta = 0.05$ ) show no significant relationship here. However, the relationship between bureaucratic form and thoroughness of reporting is moderately strong ( $r = 0.24$ ,  $beta = 0.20$ ). Causal direction is clearer here, as it is not likely that the use of fact-based, balanced, primary sourced content would lead bloggers to divide labor and create rules – it should work the other way around. However, it could be argued that formality of the news process is a dimension of, rather than an effect from, bureaucratic form. Regularity of posting does not correlate substantially with the bureaucratic form index, indicating this is neither an effect from the existence of rules and division of labor, nor a dimension of bureaucracy.

The final research question asks about the nature of the relationship between pursuit of revenue, bureaucratic form, and popularity of the blog. There are positive bivariate correlations among these variables, but not so high as to cause problems for multiple regression analysis (the highest bivariate correlation is 0.34). Pursuit of revenue is moderately related to both blog popularity ( $r = 0.28$ ) and to bureaucratic form ( $r = 0.34$ ). Blog popularity is only weakly related to bureaucratic form ( $r = 0.17$ ).

Regression analyses were also conducted in which each of the three variables was predicted by the other two, controlling for each predictor (Table 2). Results show that pursuit of revenue predicts both popularity ( $beta = 0.23$ ) and bureaucratic form ( $beta = 0.31$ ), and popularity and bureaucratic form both predict pursuit of revenue. There is no significant relationship between bureaucratic form and popularity. This suggests pursuit of revenue enables organizational form (hiring staff, dividing labor, establishing policies), and it leads to more incoming links (popularity) – but organizational form has little direct effect on increasing incoming blog links. Considering the positive relationship

between bureaucratic form and reporting, it may be that revenue encourages and enables organizational form, which in turn encourages more thorough and balanced reporting – which in turn leads to more incoming links (popularity). So, organizational form may in fact help bring in links indirectly, through an impact on the content of postings. In addition, popularity (intensity of the public gaze) also appears to encourage regularity of postings.

## **Discussion**

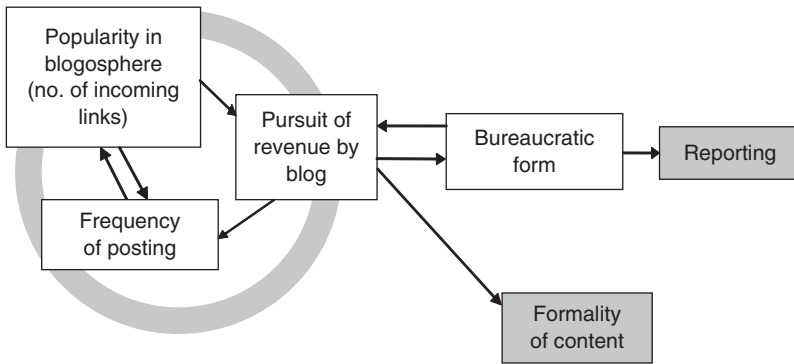
Findings show evidence that, at least for this sample, public interest blogs have been adopting aspects of organizational form. Around half spell out terms of use and legality, just fewer than 40 percent have staff (paid and unpaid), and close to a third specialize staff roles. These attributes of organizational form reflect Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy, but possessing them does not turn most bloggers into stable organizations, as organizations are popularly conceived. Even blogging operations with many of these attributes are nascent, fledgling operations. Still, it is noteworthy that a medium so strongly defined by its personal, unfettered and unpolished nature would acquire so many of these attributes.

Data here offer a snapshot in time, and so it is not possible to claim change over time. However, data from Technorati and Pew studies show that advertising and earnings have increased over the last few years, and studies of bloggers' motivations show an increased interest in gaining and influencing readers, and in earning money from blogging. This evidence hints at a trend.

Findings from this exploratory study reveal a possible direction of influence among the variables assessed in this study: pursuit of revenue, popularity, frequency of posting, organizational form, and formality of blog content (Figure 1). Results suggest a dynamic interconnection among three of these variables: pursuit of revenue, popularity and posting frequency. Advertising is moderately related to frequency of posting, frequency and popularity (incoming links) are very strongly correlated, and popularity in turn correlates with pursuit of ad revenue. Causal direction is not entirely clear, but the relationship suggests a cycle of revenue earning in which greater prominence in the blogosphere leads to a greater chance of attracting advertising, which brings revenue that enables and encourages productivity in posting, which in turn draws more attention to the site and greater prominence, which attracts advertising – and so on.

Pursuit of ad revenue is central to this model, having two other distinct effects. One, advertising is directly related to the degree to which bloggers 'tighten up' and formalize the language of their postings. This suggests a somewhat superficial effect, perhaps driven by a perceived need to appear more legitimate for advertisers. Two, while advertising does not directly lead to increased reporting activity, advertising seems to affect reporting activity indirectly, by enabling the blog's organizational characteristics, which in turn enable hiring of staff, necessary for information gathering. Though anecdotal evidence has indicated that blogs that gather their own information are more popular in the blogosphere, the evidence here offers no support for this assumed relationship. Perhaps a measure of actual site traffic would show this relationship.

A tentative model is presented here, based on these exploratory findings:



**Figure 1.** Revenue cycle

The model suggests content is shaped at a variety of levels, a notion consistent with hierarchical models of influence on media content (Dimmick and Coit, 1982; McQuail, 2005; Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). At the organizational level, systems and structures enable more rigorous reporting, and at the wider institutional and market levels, these organizational systems and structures are themselves enabled by ad revenue. At the audience/community level, increased prominence is especially strongly related to frequency of posting. Partly this reflects numerical odds – the more posts a blogger publishes, the more likely others will notice and link to a post. Also, frequency of posting leads to greater visibility for search engines, as their algorithms typically include frequency of updating as a criterion for listing a site prominently. But the literature also suggests that strong intensity of the public gaze increases bloggers' awareness of readers, leading to more pressure to produce – and fostering the development of conventional impressions of readers (Lowrey and Latta, 2008; Schmidt, 2007).

Bloggers who discuss the phenomenon of formal blog content describe it as selling out, or losing one's edge, or going corporate. They have a point, beyond just concerns over diminishment of an 'edgy', confrontational blogging form. Arguably, blogs and other independent public issue venues have enriched the margins of the public sphere, daring to tread where traditional media have not. When bloggers exercise more caution, dilute their venom and lose the slang and snark, does this water down, or signal a watering down of, the public discussion? Do we end up with fewer valuable, challenging viewpoints?

On the flip side, increased caution may indicate increased care, diluted venom may mean a higher ratio of information to polarizing commentary, and curbed slang may reflect more diligent editing. In short, formalization of processes and output may encourage, and reflect, professionalizing tendencies. A variety of factors can encourage a move toward professionalism, including competition from other occupations, and even technological changes. But professional guidelines also tend to go hand in hand with organizational policies for professionals working in organizations. And so organizational structure, processes, and specialization can encourage a professional orientation up to a point (Abbott, 1991), though at higher professional levels, organizational/administrative

and professional control can clash (e.g. Freidson, 1994). Desire for increased revenue may also influence orientation toward professionalism, though results here suggest this tends to encourage only the appearance of professionalism.

This study is limited by the fact that results may not be generalized to the entire population of blogs, as the sample was skewed toward the more visible and popular. The study is also limited by the inherent limitations of content analysis. For example, the causal line drawn between intensity of public gaze and frequency of posting can be only speculative, implied by a suggested correlation in the literature. Surveys of bloggers would provide more direct evidence about such motivations, and surveys would also provide more accurate and nuanced evidence about such matters as staffing and specialization of staff roles. It may be that some blogs do not list all staff, or that staffing information is dated.

Survey analysis would also help reveal the negative personal consequences of increased popularity, of responsibilities of working with staff, enforcing rules and guidelines and dealing with advertisers. The literature suggests many bloggers and citizen journalists are burning out (Bradshaw, 2008; Garber, 2010; Richtel, 2008). Some have decided to quit (Rettberg, 2008). A venture that began for many as a way to get things off one's chest, or perhaps to find like-minded souls, may become an end in itself, a machine that demands incessant feeding and maintenance.

An ecological study of the dynamic processes of both emerging and traditional media, and of their interaction, could be interesting and helpful. This is speculation, but one might imagine a media landscape in which many of today's traditional media continue to fragment and unbundle, shedding employees who go on to initiate other 'populations' of forms of news and information, from blogs or blog groups, to social collectives of displaced journalists, to foundation-supported efforts, and to groups formed within social media. Many who swim in this great pool of variation would presumably seek greater legitimacy, credibility, reduced uncertainty, and safe, productive niches – all factors that may lead to stabilization of processes, structures, and output, for some (Aldrich and Reuf, 2007). It may not be, as some post-industrialists have argued, that bureaucracy is dying. It may be instead that some structures are eroding, even as others are rising to take their place. A hierarchical pecking order reduces uncertainty and complexity – for sources, for audiences, and for media producers. Organizational form and hierarchy bring constraints, but they also encourage a shared understanding about legitimacy. And so it seems likely that someone must rise to the top, even if that someone is no longer today's media organizations.

## Notes

- 1 See also <http://technorati.com/blogging/feature/state-of-the-blogosphere-2009/#ixzz0nXQVHNlf>
- 2 Coders were instructed to find blogs where at least half of the postings shown on the homepage focus substantially on public interest issues. These are the issue types covered by traditional reporting beats and which are likely to be found in the main news section of a traditional daily newspaper, including: politics, government, foreign policy and military, technology, environment, crime, education, business and economics, and law. Personal diary-style blogs that do not focus on issues of public interest were filtered out.

- 3 Measures form an index rather than a scale. Whereas items in a scale express an existing latent concept, items in an index exist in their own right and 'build' a concept (DeVellis, 1991; Spector, 1992). In this index, for example, a high score suggests a blog with organizational aspects, but the individual index items – having staff or rules – do not 'express' some latent orientation the blog has toward organization. Technically, it is not as necessary to test indices for internal reliability because a high score on one item may compensate for a low score on another (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001; Netemeyer et al., 2003).
- 4 No distinction was made between 'auto-generated' ads that might be placed by a hosting service and ads specific to the blog.
- 5 Copy from postings was copied and pasted into Microsoft Word version 2002, and a 'Spelling and Grammar' scan was conducted. Each problem noted by the scan was counted unless the coder judged the 'catch' to be obviously not a problem – for example, use of words commonly used but not in the Word dictionary, such as 'blog'.

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