THE EVOLUTION OF MEDIA INDUSTRIES AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE: DOES
THE BLOGOSPHERE SERVE AS A PUBLIC SPHERE?

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of
Georgetown University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts in Communication, Culture and Technology

By

Karthik K. Ramachandran, B.S.

Washington, DC
July 26, 2006
Some believe that the Internet has the potential to make real the promise of
democracy—a government of and for the people; others fear that the Internet will
fundamentally undermine democracy by Balkanizing society. Those who believe in the
democratizing nature of the Internet argue that the Internet is a powerful medium for
disseminating information, which allows individuals to share their ideas as well as
respond to the opinions of others. The goal of this thesis is to theoretically and
empirically contribute to this debate.

More specifically, this thesis attempted to understand whether the blogosphere—
widely lauded as the most democratic corner of the Internet—supports political discourse.
Towards that end, the work of Jurgen Habermas, James Curran, C. Edwin Baker, Evertt
Rogers and others are synthesized to develop a theory that both defines the requirements
that democracy imposes upon media and describes how over time, due to
commercialization, new mediums lose the ability to satisfy these requirements. Then, in
an attempt to show the plausibility of the theory, the case of the American newspaper
industry is presented. Finally, the theory is evaluated in light of the history and current state of the blogosphere.

To analyze the current state of discourse in the blogosphere this study utilizes social network analysis. More specifically, this thesis examines the networks that emerge within the blogosphere in reaction to op-ed pieces published in Washington Post for evidence of link reciprocity. It further examines those networks that show evidence link reciprocity for evidence of communication between members of different groups, and evidence of communication among members of the same group. It finds that the vast majority of these networks show no evidence of link reciprocity. This indicates that discourse in the blogosphere maybe rare. Further, it finds that links among members of the same group are more common then links among members of different groups.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION** ............................................................................. 1
2. **CHAPTER TWO: MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY.** ......................................................... 11
   2.1 The Public Sphere .......................................................................................... 12
   2.2 The Media and the Public Sphere ................................................................. 17
   2.3 The Media, Commercialization and the Public Sphere .................................. 22
3. **CHAPTER THREE: THE AMERICAN NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY** ............................... 32
   3.1 The Commercialization of the Newspaper Industry ...................................... 32
      3.1.1 Phase 1: 1690-1765 ........................................................................... 34
      3.1.2 Phase 2: 1765-1833 .......................................................................... 43
      3.1.3 Phase 3: 1833 – ............................................................................... 54
   3.2 The Newspaper Industry and the Public Sphere ............................................. 63
4. **CHAPTER FOUR: THE AMERICAN BLOGOSPHERE** ............................................. 72
   4.1 The Commercialization of the Blogosphere ................................................... 73
      4.1.1 Phase 1: 1994-July, 1999 .................................................................. 74
      4.1.2 Phase 2: July, 1999- November, 2004 ................................................ 80
      4.1.3 Phase 3: 2005 .................................................................................... 89
5. **CHAPTER FIVE: THE BLOGOSPHERE AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE** ....................... 94
   5.1 Literature Review ......................................................................................... 96
   5.2 Methodology ............................................................................................... 103
5.2.1 Data Collection Methodology .................................................... 104
5.2.2 Analytic Methodology ............................................................ 108
5.3 Results ....................................................................................... 114
6 CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION ....................................................... 122
   6.1 Theory .................................................................................... 123
   6.2 The American Newspaper Industry ........................................ 131
   6.3 The American Blogosphere .................................................... 133
   6.4 A Link Analysis of the American Blogosphere ....................... 137
   6.5 Conclusion .............................................................................. 141
1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of the United States is predicated on the idea “that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market.”\(^1\) Thus, the development of a marketplace of ideas has long been one of the core goals of US communications policy.\(^2\) The government has, over time, come to the conclusion that the best way to ensure the existence of a vibrant marketplace of ideas is to ensure freedom of the press and to foster the diversity of viewpoints.\(^3\)

In the United States, the freedom of the press is enshrined in the first amendment. However, the government has only begun to foster the diversity of information content in the last century with the advent of broadcasting.\(^4\) Initially, government regulated the broadcast industry to deal with a scarcity of broadcast spectrum, which resulted in multiple individuals, using identical or nearby frequencies and drowning each other out. Responding to this problem of cacophonic interference, Congress passed the Radio Act of 1927, which gave the Federal Radio Commission the right to license broadcast frequencies and required licensees to “serve the public interest, convenience, and

\(^{1}\)Abrams v. United States 250 U.S. 616, 630 (1919) (Homes, J. dissenting)


\(^{3}\)Id. at 83

\(^{4}\)Id. at 81
necessity.”

Over time, this public interest language became the legal basis of the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) goal of promoting viewpoint diversity.

While the earliest motivation for regulation was cacophonic interference, subsequent motivation has related to economic outcomes and democratic values. The economics of the broadcast industry favor aggregation because the production of content is very expensive while its distribution is very inexpensive. In the United States, this economic reality collides with democratic values, which require “the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources.” The economics of mass media encourage consolidation, while our democratic principles require diversity, which in turn is thought to require the diversification of ownership. With this in mind, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) has “long acted on the theory that diversification of mass media ownership serves the public interest by promoting diversity of programs and service viewpoints, and preventing undue concentration of economic power.”

__________________________________________________________________________


6 The Federal Communications Commission is the successor agency of the Federal Radio Commission.

7 Steve Mitra, The Death of Media Regulation in the Age of the Internet, 4 JOURNAL OF LEGISLATION AND PUBLIC POLICY 415, 420 (2001).


10 Prometheus Radio Project v. FCC, Nos. 03-3388, 03-3577, 03-3578, 03-3579, 03-3580, 03-3581, 03-3582, 03-3651, 03-3665, 03-3675, 03-3708, 03-3894, 03-3950, 03-3951, 03-4072, 03-4073 & 04-1956, 2004 U.S. App., LEXIS 12720, at **15 (3d Cir., June 24, 2004)
Notwithstanding the FCC’s historic efforts to foster viewpoint diversity by diversifying media ownership, a policy shift toward deregulation (which favors consolidation) started in the 1980’s and culminated with the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The Act made several changes to broadcast media ownership rules: (1) It eliminated all limits on national radio ownership;11 (2) It relaxed the national television ownership rule12; (3) It required the FCC to “conduct a rulemaking proceeding to determine whether to retain, modify, or eliminate”13 local television ownership limits; (4) It directed the FCC to review biennially the broadcast media ownership rules;14 and (5) It required the FCC to “repeal or modify any regulation that it determines is no longer in the public interest”15

In 1999, the Commission conducted a review of the local television ownership rules, as required by the 1996 Act, and further relaxed many of these rules. Meanwhile, in 1998 the Commission began its first biennial review of the broadcast ownership rules, as required by the 1996 Act.16 Both of these rule makings were appealed, and both


12Telecommunications Act of 1996 §202(c)(1)(B)(changed the audience reach cap from 25% to 35%), amended by FY2004 Consolidated Appropriations Act, Pub L. No 108-109,§629 (changed the cap from 35% to 39%)

13Telecommunications Act of 1996 §202 (c)(2)

14Telecommunications Act of 1996 §202 (h)

15Telecommunications Act of 1996 §202 (h)

16Prometheus Radio Project v. FCC, Nos. 03-3388, 03-3577, 03-3578, 03-3579, 03-3580, 03-3581, 03-3582, 03-3651, 03-3665, 03-3675, 03-3708, 03-3894, 03-3950, 03-3951, 03-4072, 03-4073 & 04-1956, 2004 U.S. App., LEXIS 12720, at **22 (3d Cir., June 24, 2004)
appeals were heard by the United States Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. The D.C. Circuit vacated and remanded the whole of both rule makings. The Commission revisited the remanded rules in its 2002 rulemaking.

The Court’s decision in the case of the local television ownership rulemaking heavily influenced the Commission’s 2002 rulemaking. In the 1999 rulemaking, the Commission adopted a new rule that would allow two commonly owned television stations in the same market as long as (1) neither station was among the four largest stations in the market and (2) eight independently owned stations remained in the market. On appeal, the petitioner challenged the “eight independent voices” exception, arguing that it was unrelated to the Commission’s stated goal of promoting diversity in local markets. The Court ruled that, while the eight independent voices exception was in line with the Commission’s goal of promoting diversity, the Commission had not provided a rational basis for excluding non-broadcast media from the eight voices exception.

In the 2002 rule making, the FCC incorporated non-broadcast media into its analysis, and further relaxed the media ownership rules. The FCC cited changes in


19 *Id., cites* Sinclair Broad. Group, Inc. v. FCC, 284 F.3d 148(D.C. Cir. 2002) at 165

technology as its major motivation for rethinking the media-ownership regime. In particular, the FCC felt that the previous regime ignored the “diversity-enhancing value of the Internet”\(^{21}\). In an effort to take non-broadcast media, particularly the Internet, into account, the FCC constructed a diversity index that was used as the basis for setting the threshold ownership limits in the new rules. The Diversity Index was inspired by the Hefindahl-Hirschmann Index, which the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission use to evaluate the effect of a merger on competition. Analogously, the Diversity Index is intended to identify those markets in which additional concentration in media ownership might have a deleterious effect on viewpoint diversity.\(^{22}\) The Commission calculated the Diversity Index for a sample of large, medium, and small markets as well as for those markets were certain mergers allowed to occur. From these calculations the Commission produced a three-tiered system, based on market size, of bright line tests.\(^{23}\)

The Diversity Index was intended to measure viewpoint diversity, “[the] availability of a wide range of information and political perspectives on important

---

\(^{21}\) Id. ¶ 4


\(^{23}\) Id.
issues,” within a local market by examining the availability of independently owned media outlets. However, the diversity index does not take into account all media outlets available in a particular market, only television, daily and weekly newspapers, radio, and the Internet. Interestingly enough, the FCC chose to exclude cable from its diversity index stating that “most consumers either do not have access to such sources…or rely on them very little.” The Commission’s decision to exclude cable and include the Internet would later become a major point of contention.

A number of different groups appealed the results of the 2002 review. A common theme of these challenges was criticism of the Diversity Index. Those who opposed the FCC’s deregulatory trend argued that it gave “too much weight to the Internet at the expense of television and daily newspapers, thereby understating the level of concentration and overstating the level of diversity.” Others argued that the FCC should not have included the Internet because “people only utilize the Internet to access their newspapers’ and local broadcast stations’ websites and, therefore, the Internet does not add to diversity.” Some who felt that the FCC hadn’t gone far enough in deregulating media argued that, “the Diversity Index understates the actual amount of

24 REPORT AND ORDER, supra note 20, ¶ 4

25 Id., ¶ 391

26 Id., ¶ 392

27 Prometheus Radio Project v. FCC, Nos. 03-3388, 03-3577, 03-3578, 03-3579, 03-3580, 03-3581, 03-3582, 03-3651, 03-3665, 03-3675, 03-3708, 03-3894, 03-3950, 03-3951, 03-4072, 03-4073 & 04-1956, 2004 U.S. App., LEXIS 12720, at **80 (3d Cir., June 24, 2004)

28 REPORT AND ORDER, supra note 20, ¶ 427
diversity in a market by ignoring important media outlets, primarily cable television."\textsuperscript{29} In the end, the Third Circuit ruled against the FCC, holding that the FCC’s “decision to count the Internet as a source of viewpoint diversity, while discounting cable, was not rational.”\textsuperscript{30}

The continued controversy over media ownership policy raises questions about the “diversity-enhancing value” of the Internet. As noted, the diversity index employed by the FCC hardly settled the matter. Equally important, while the Internet is widely considered to be a powerful medium for disseminating information and allowing individuals to share their viewpoints, it is unclear that the Internet is actually being used for this purpose. In particular, the blogosphere, which is often touted as a viable alternative to mass media, and described as a vibrant forum in which the issues of the day are vigorously debated, does not appear to fulfill its potential.

This thesis aims to explore these issues. In particular it asks whether the blogosphere serves as a political public sphere. To this end, it compares the blogosphere to the theoretical ideal of a public sphere advanced by Jurgen Habermas\textsuperscript{31}. For Habermas, a public sphere “can best be described as a network for communicating

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{29}Prometheus, 2004 U.S. App. LEXUS 12720, at **80

\textsuperscript{30}Id.

\end{footnotesize}
information and points of view” in which “the streams of communication are...filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions.”

In addition to defining an ideal public sphere, Habermas also advanced a theory of how the original public sphere—the bourgeois eighteenth-century European public sphere—was fatally transformed by commercialization. Habermas theorized that the commercialization of media doomed its ability to serve as a forum for discourse. He empirically grounded his argument in the history of the newspaper industry, arguing that the newspaper industry began as a system of private correspondences, conducted for private pleasure, produced by citizens, and then evolved into system of profit-oriented enterprises, funded by advertising revenue, and produced by professionals.

In the past few years, we have witnessed an analogous transformation of the blogosphere. Blogs have gone from being a form of private correspondence, produced by private individuals, for private pleasure; to being a profit-oriented industry, funded by advertising revenue and produced by professionals. If Habermas’ theory of the transformation of the public sphere is correct, this transformation would—other things being equal—similarly reduce the blogosphere’s ability to serve as a public sphere.


33 Id.

34 Jurgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (Thomas Burger trans., The MIT Press 1991) (1962)
Thus, given the growing commercialization of the blogosphere, this thesis hypothesizes that it does not serve as a Habermasian public sphere.

This thesis proceeds in two parts. First, the thesis provides a rationale for the hypothesis that the blogosphere is not a public sphere, arguing that Habermas’ theory of the transformation of the public sphere applies to the blogosphere. It advances this argument by comparing and contrasting the case of the blogosphere to the newspaper industry, Habermas’ ideal case. Second, the thesis tests Habermas’ theory by answering the question of whether the blogosphere is a public sphere. It does so by utilizing network analysis to compare the political blogosphere to Habermas’ ideal political public sphere. To this end, it operationalizes Habermas’ definition of the public sphere in terms of network structure. It then compares this ideal structure to the structure of the networks of blogs that emerge in response to op-ed pieces in the Washington Post. This thesis considers these networks a sample of the political blogosphere. By comparing the structure of these networks against Habermas’ ideal, it aims to determine whether, in general, the political blogosphere is serving as a public sphere.

This thesis is comprised of five chapters. This chapter serves as an introduction, articulating the research question and grounding it in a larger context. The second chapter provides a conceptual framework for answering the research question. The third chapter presents a comparative case study of the blogosphere and the newspaper industry, justifying the application of Habermas’ theories to the blogosphere. The fourth chapter, tests Habermas’ theory presents an empirical examination of the blogosphere to answer
the question of whether the blogosphere is a public sphere. Chapter five concludes with findings and observations.
2  Chapter Two: Media and Democracy.

The specific goal of this thesis is to understand whether the blogosphere serves as a political public sphere.¹ More specifically, this thesis compares the blogosphere to the theoretical notion of the political public sphere advanced by Jürgen Habermas.² Based on Habermas’ narrative of the transformation of the original political public sphere, this thesis hypothesizes that the blogosphere does not serve as a political public sphere. While Habermas’ narrative of the transformation of the public sphere is complex and historically specific, the core of his argument is that the commercialization of the early print media destroyed the original public sphere.³

Viewed more broadly, from a higher level of abstraction, this thesis is concerned with the ability of media to support democracy by promoting a public sphere. The public sphere is a key component of democracy because it facilitates the development of public opinion, which is the basis of political action in a democracy. We can consider the

¹A number of different authors have advanced conflicting accounts of whether or not the internet serves as a public sphere. E.g. Lee Slater, Democracy, New Social Movements, and the Internet, in Cyberactivism 117-44 (Martha McCaughey and Micheal D. Ayers eds., 2003); A. Wilhem, Virtual Sounding Boards: How Deliberative Is Online Political Discussion?”, in Digital Democracy (B. Hauge and B. Loader eds., 1999)

²See Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (Thomas Burger trans., The MIT Press 1991) (1962) (In this work Habermas first advances a notion of the public sphere) See also Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms (William Rehg trans., The MIT Press 1998) (1996) (In this work Habermas clarifies his notion of the public sphere and situates it in a discourse theory of democracy)

blogosphere to be another form of media—analogous to newspapers, magazines, radio or television. The hypothesis put forward here—that the blogosphere cannot serve as a political public sphere—is based on the notion that commercialism undermines the ability of media to effectively carry out its political function. This notion is a staple of legal theory, communications theory, and information economics.

The specific goal of this chapter is to layout a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between the blogosphere, commercialization and the public sphere. More broadly, it aims to provide an analytical basis for understanding the relationship between democracy, commercialization and the media. To this end the chapter consists of three sections. The first defines the public sphere, and describes its relationship to democracy. The second discusses the role of the media in sustaining the public sphere. The final section describes the process of commercialization, and explains why it undermines the media’s ability to support the public sphere.

2.1 The Public Sphere

Viewed in the abstract, the public sphere is the social network that emerges when a public engages in discourse. Habermas describes the public sphere as “a network for communicating information and points of view.”

This section seeks to clarify this definition. It begins by describing the role of the public sphere in the democratic process. Next, it examines the actors within the public sphere. It then considers the form of

---

communication—discourse—that ties these actors together. Finally, foreshadowing the discussion that follows, this section looks at the different ways in which the internal structure of the public sphere can be viewed.

The role of the public sphere in the political process is to move issues that are raised by civil society into the center of political system. The public sphere must first “act as a sounding board for problems that must be processed by the political system because they cannot be solved elsewhere.” The public sphere must then “amplify the pressure of problems…not only detect and identify problems but also convincingly and influentially thematize them, furnish them with possible solutions, and dramatize them in such a way that they are taken up and dealt with by parliamentary complexes.”

Not all members of the public participate in the public sphere; only the subsection of the public that is referred to as civil society participates. Civil society is “the more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organizations and movements that, attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life spheres, distill and transmit such reaction in amplified form to the public sphere.” When the values of civil society mirror the values of discourse, civil society lends continuity and permanence to discourse. In this sense, civil society can be viewed as a “network of associations that institutionalizes

---

5 Habermas, supra note 4, at 359.
6 Id.
7 Id.
8 Id. at 373.
9 Id. at 367.
problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest inside the framework of the organized public sphere.”

Discourse is the basis of both the notion of civil society, and the notion of the public sphere. Discourse is communication oriented toward ascertaining the validity of a claim. For a specific communicative act to be considered an instance of discourse three things should be more or less true: (1) all participants must be equal i.e. they “must have equal opportunities to raise topics, arguments, and criticisms”; (2) the situation should be free of all forms of coercion i.e. “the situation must exclude all force ‘except the force of the better argument’”; and (3) the situation must “exclude all motives except for the search for the truth.” In practice not all claims can be resolved through discourse, and few situations fulfill all three of the requirements advanced above.

There are three forms of discourse, ethical, moral and pragmatic. Pragmatic discourse deals with the “means for realizing goals and preferences that are already given.” In pragmatic discourse “the outcome turns on arguments that relate empirical knowledge to given preferences and ends, and that assess the (usually uncertain)


10 *Id.*


13 *Id.*

14 *Id.*

15 HABERMAS, supra note 4 at 159.
consequences of alternative choices according to previously accepted maxims or decision rules.”

It is important to note that in pragmatic discourse, the values, norms, and decision rules to be applied are taken as given. This is in contrast to moral and ethical discourse, which focuses on defining values, norms and decision rules. Moral discourse deals with questions of justice. These questions are not specific to a single group, rather they affect society as a whole. In moral discourse the “outcome turns on arguments showing that the interests embodied in contested norms are unreservedly universalizable.” Ethical discourses are aimed at achieving self-understanding. In such discourses, “the participants want to get a clear understanding of themselves as members of a specific nation, as members of a local community, as inhabitants of a region and so on.” Participants in these discourses hope to determine “which traditions they will continue; they strive to determine how they will treat one another and how they will treat minorities and marginal groups.”

The ability of the public to engage in moral discourse is dependent upon the ability of sub-groups to first engage in ethical discourse. This is because the search for common good can only occur if groups have defined themselves and their interests. Groups need to have the opportunity to develop and articulate their identities independent

\[Id.\] at 160.

\[Id.\] at 162.

\[Id.\] at 282.

\[Id.\]

of, but in relation to, the rest of society. This process of group identity formation requires inter-group discourse, which in turn requires that these groups have “their own public spheres and media.”  

However, these public spheres should not be viewed as being separate from the society wide public sphere. Rather they should be visualized as structures that emerge within the larger public sphere.

The internal structure of the public sphere is complex and can be viewed through multiple lenses. For example, the public sphere can be viewed through the lens of geography, “[the public sphere] branches out into a multitude of overlapping international, national, regional, local, and sub cultural arenas.” Alternatively, the public sphere can be segmented by topics of discourse, “functional specifications, thematic foci, policy fields, and so forth, provide the points of reference for a substantive differentiation of public spheres.” Finally, we can differentiate the public sphere in terms of the mediums on which it is based, “from the episodic publics found in taverns, coffee houses, or on the streets; through the occasional or ‘arranged’ publics of particular presentations and events…up to the abstract public sphere of isolated readers, listeners,

---

21 BAKER, supra note 20, at 146. See also Nancy Fraser, Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy, in HABERMAS AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE 109 (Craig Calhoun ed., 1992).

22 HABERMAS, supra note 4, at 373. See also Fraser supra 21 at 126

23 HABERMAS, supra note 4, at 373

24 Id. at 374.
and viewers scattered across large geographic areas, or even around the globe, and brought together only through the mass media.”

2.2 The Media and the Public Sphere

Early democracies were small enough both in terms of geography and population that a vibrant public sphere could be built upon face-to-face interactions. In contrast, the size of modern democracies requires that the public sphere be brought together through the media. In order to support the public sphere, the media must be able to fulfill a number of different and at times contradictory roles. This section explores not only what the media ought to do in order to support the public sphere, but also the more general question of what democracy requires of the media.

While the media is required to expand the public sphere beyond the realm of face-to-face interactions, the media’s ability to support the public sphere is as much a function of its ability to promote “fruitful and clarifying discussion” as its ability to reach large numbers of people. In order to promote “fruitful and clarifying discussion” the media must, in a general sense, perform at least two functions: (1) it must provide the public

25 Id. at 374.


27 HABERMAS, supra note 4, at 374. See also Nicholas Garnham, The Media and the Public Sphere, in Habermas and The Public Sphere 109 (Craig Calhoun ed., 1992).

28 HABERMAS, supra note 4, at 362.
with information; and (2) it must serve as a forum for discourse. \(^{29}\) Given the complexity and plurality of modern society, a single homogenous media cannot fulfill both these roles for all groups with a society.

The media’s ability to educate and inform the public is the basis of its role in generating the public sphere as well as supporting the democratic process. To provide the public with the information it needs to participate in the political process, the media must do two things: (1) it must carefully watch the sociopolitical environment and report on developments that are likely to affect the welfare of citizens; \(^{30}\) and (2) it must serve as the public’s watchdog, \(^{31}\) critically examining the political process and bringing any failures to the public’s attention. Since different groups have different interests, a single homogenous media will be unable to fulfill these tasks for all groups. \(^{32}\) Thus, each subgroup needs its own media, a media that is capable of identifying the issues relevant to that group.

\(^{29}\) In the literature there are a number of different accounts of what the media must do in order to support the public sphere; these accounts all have these two things in common and many of the other responsibilities they assign to the media can be considered a subordinate to these two responsibilities, see Baker supra 20; Habermas supra 4 at 378 (citing M. Gurevitch and G. Blumler, Political Communication Systems and Democratic Values, in Democracy and the Mass Media 270 (J. Lichtenberg ed., 1990)); James Curran, Mass Media and Democracy, in Mass Media and Society 83 (James Curran and Michael Gurevitch eds, 1991); Nicholas Garnham, The Media and the Public Sphere, in Habermas and the Public Sphere 359 (Craig Calhoun ed., 1992).


\(^{31}\) The watchdog role is mentioned almost universally in the literature, see e.g. sources cited supra note 29.

\(^{32}\) Baker, supra note 20, at 148.
In order to support the public sphere, the media must also serve as a forum for discourse. It is important to keep in mind that the public sphere emerges only as a result of discourse, and that there are three types of discourse—pragmatic, ethical and moral discourse. Thus, the media must support debates among members of groups and societies on the application of accepted norms and values to various problems (pragmatic discourse) as well as support discourse that leads to the formation of those norms and values at both the sub-society or group level (ethical discourse) and at the society-wide level (moral discourse).

To support pragmatic discourse, the media must, in a comprehensive and balanced manner, present the problem under consideration, the applicable norms, values and decision rules, and the various solutions to the public. Pragmatic discourse deals with the application of existing norms, values and decision process to problems; and takes place at both the group and society wide levels. The media can best support pragmatic discourse by being comprehensive and balanced in its presentation of the problem and proposed solutions. Although the media need not advocate for any particular solution, it should provide a platform for the advocates of the various solutions to make their cases to the public.

To support moral discourse the media must first and foremost be inclusive. Moral discourse deals with questions of the common good at the society wide level. To support this form of discourse, the media must present the viewpoints of all of society’s constituent groups in a civil, balanced, and comprehensive manner. Finally, unlike pragmatic discourse, moral discourse requires that the media deliver more than news and
political debate; it must also provide the public with cultural artifacts such as fiction, art and dance. These artifacts have a discursive significance, when values are under consideration.\footnote{Baker, supra note 20, at 150}

To support ethical discourse the media needs to support “groups’ internal discursive and reflective needs for self-definition, cultural development, and value clarification.”\footnote{Id.} Ethical discourse deals with group identity, value and norm formation. To support ethical discourse the media must be segmented, with each group having a segment of the media dedicated to its interests. Each group’s segment must present the various competing viewpoints within the group in a fair, objective, inclusive way. Each group’s segment should serve as a platform for voices within that group. Finally, ethical discourse, like moral discourse, requires the delivery of cultural artifacts to the public.

Not surprisingly, given the number of difficult, and occasionally contradictory, requirements with which the media must comply in order to support the public sphere, different portions of the media fulfill different requirements based on their business models. Thus, we can view the media as consisting of at least four sectors: (1) the core sector, (2) the civil media; (3) the professional sector; and (4) the private enterprise sector.\footnote{See Curran, supra note 29, at 105-11 (Curran actually has a fifth sector, the social market sector.) See also Baker, supra note 20, at 189} The core sector facilitates moral discourse, bringing different groups together in the same public dialog, and encouraging agreement and compromise. An example of the

\footnote{Baker, supra note 20, at 150}

\footnote{Id.}

\footnote{See Curran, supra note 29, at 105-11 (Curran actually has a fifth sector, the social market sector.) See also Baker, supra note 20, at 189}
core sector is the public broadcasting system. The civil media facilitates ethical discourse. Examples of civil media include “party controlled, general-interest newspapers; identity-oriented media entities such as gay magazines; and organizational-oriented media such as newsletters that provide for groups’ internal communication needs.”

In the civil sector, the communities served by a particular media entity finance that media entity. For example, the party and its supporters largely finance party-controlled newspapers. The next two sectors are as crucial as the first two in allowing the media to support discourse; however, unlike the first two they are unassociated with a specific form of discourse. The professional sector is independent of the state and the market. It consists of professionals that are free “of any obligations to serve any ideal other than internal professional standards.”

Unfortunately, this sector is more of an ideal than a reality; most news organizations that claim to be members of the professional sector might be more properly classified as members of the private enterprise sector. The private enterprise sector is the sector of the media that is responsive to audience and advertiser demand. It, like the professional sector, is independent of government and composed of professionals; however, unlike the professional sector, it is beholden to the market. This sector strives to simultaneous sell information and cultural artifacts to the public, and to sell the public to advertisers.

36 BAKER, supra note 20, at 189

37 Id.
2.3 The Media, Commercialization and the Public Sphere

Commercialized media, or advertiser-supported media, is unable to support the public sphere. New media industries go through a process of commercialization, which moves them through a series of business models. The process culminates when a new medium’s industry adopts an advertiser support business model. The economics of this business model greatly diminishes the ability of a medium to support the public sphere. This section presents this argument in two parts. It begins by characterizing the process of commercialization; and concludes with a discussion of why the economics of advertising are toxic to the public sphere.

A new medium’s industry goes through a process of commercialization that proceeds in three phases. These phases are best demarcated by shifts in the business models utilized by that industry. Initially, a new medium’s industry focuses on selling information and cultural artifacts to the public. Over time, its business model shifts to selling the public to politicians and civil society actors. Finally, its business model evolves into selling the public to advertisers.

The preference of a medium’s industry for different business models at different phases of its development can be explained by a synthesis of economics and diffusion theory. Diffusion theory views the development of a technology as “a sequence of

38There are a few studies which have attempted to apply diffusion theory to communication industries see Sachin Gupta, Dipak C. Jain & Mohambir S. Sawhney, Modeling the Evolution of Markets with Indirect Network Externalities: An Application to Digital Television, 18 MARKETING SCIENCE 396 (1999); Melvin L. de Fleur, Mass Communication and Social Change, 44 SOCIAL FORCES 314 (1966).
equilibriums determined by changes in the economic attributes of the innovation and the environment.”

It highlights the importance of “(i) differences (such as size) between potential adopters; (ii) the interactions between the supply decisions of the firms producing innovation and the pace of their adoption; (iii) the technological expectations of suppliers and adopters; (iv) the market structure in both the supply and using industries.”

By analyzing the diffusion of a medium along these lines, it is possible to see how changes in the number and types of adopters result in changes in which business models are optimal.

Diffusion theory tells us that individuals in a society do not all adopt an innovation at the same time; rather at different points different types of people adopt an innovation. Diffusion theory identifies five idealized adopter categories into which most people fall: (1) innovators, (2) early adopters, (3) early majority; (4) late majority; (5) laggards. The phases of commercialization described above entail shifts between the first three of these categories: innovators, early adopters, and the early majority. Each adopter category has a distinct socioeconomic status, a distinct set of personality attributes, and a distinct set of communication behavior. These characteristics, in conjunction with economics of the industry, can explain the progression of business models.


40 Id.

41 Everett M. Rogers, Diffusion of Innovation 267-92 (5th ed. 2003)
There are a number of ways to consider the diffusion of a medium; here it is useful to think of it as two processes rather than one. On the one hand there is the diffusion of the medium among content producers, and on the other hand there is the diffusion of the medium among content consumers. For example, consider the case of television. The adoption of television required content producers to adopt a bundle of innovations that included cameras, sound equipment, and transmitters. Likewise, consumers were required to adopt a bundle of innovations; which included the television set.

Due to the presence of indirect network externalities in media industries, the two diffusion processes should proceed at roughly the same rate. The value of a medium to a consumer is directly related to the amount of content available for that medium; and the value of a medium for content producers is directly related to the number of people who consume content using that medium. On the one hand, this situation creates a chicken and egg problem: producers don’t have any incentive to produce content until there are a sufficient number of consumers; and consumers don’t have an incentive to adopt a medium until there is a sufficient amount of content. On the other hand, this same situation allows a positive feedback loop to develop: as more consumers adopt a medium, more content is produced for that medium, so more consumers adopt the medium. In either case, the rate at which a new medium diffuses through the producer community is dependent on the rate at which it diffuses through the consumer community and vice-versa.
The earliest adopters of a medium must kick-start the development of that medium. Innovators, as this group is referred to, are defined as the first 2.5% of a population to adopt an innovation. This group has a unique profile. Its primary attribute is venturesomeness; these adopters have a “desire for the rash, the daring, and the risky.”

Their interests in new ideas often lead innovators to engage outside their local peer networks. They tend to have cosmopolite social networks, and are often friends or acquaintances of other innovators. As a general rule earlier adopters are better educated, and have a higher social status than later adopters. However, successful innovators need more than education and exposure to new ideas. Chief among the prerequisites for a successfully innovator is access to significant financial resources. In general, these financial resources help innovators absorb loses from unprofitable innovations.

Give the relative size of the innovator category, as well as the characteristics of innovators, it is easy to understand why the preferred business model of the first phase is selling content. In general, there are two possible business models for media industries: (1) selling information and cultural goods (content) to consumers; and (2) selling the attention of consumers to a third party by providing the third party with the ability to distribute information to consumers. Most media industries blend these two models.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{42} See ROGERS, supra note 41, at 282; see also John W. Loy Jr., Social Psychological Characteristics of Innovators, 34 AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW 73 (1969).}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{43} ROGERS, supra note 41, at 281}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{44} ROGERS, supra note 41, at 288}\]
However, one tends to dominate in terms of percentage of revenue. The first business model has no prerequisites. On the other hand, the second model requires a critical mass of consumers, an audience large or influential enough so that a third party is willing to pay more than the cost of simply creating and distributing its content via the new medium. Innovators constitute a very small portion of the public; and tend to have a limited ability to influence larger segments of society. As such they do not represent the audience required for the second model to be viable. However, they do have the financial resources to make the first model viable.

In understanding the shift from the first phase to the second phase it is important to understand that media goods have high first-copy costs and low marginal costs. That is to say that, media goods are “costly to produce but cheap to reproduce.” This is problematic because content providers have two options: they can charge the average cost of the product or they can charge its marginal cost. Charging the average cost results in underproduction because it excludes people who would pay more for the content than it costs to provide. On the other hand, charging the marginal cost fails to produce enough revenue to cover the product’s true cost because the marginal cost of media goods is small, sometimes even zero.

Because media industries have high sunk costs and low marginal costs there are only two sustainable market structures for media content producers: (1) the dominant firm model and (2) the differentiated product model.45 In the dominant firm model, a

45 CARL SHAPIRO & HAL R. VARIAN, INFORMATION RULES 25 (1999)
single firm controls the market because it enjoys a significant cost advantage over its smaller rivals due to its size and scale economies. In media industries, a dominant firm incurs only one set of first-copy costs and is able to constantly reduce the average cost of its product by adding customers. This model requires the production of content that has wide spread appeal. On the other hand, the differentiated product model requires each firm to produce content that is targeted toward a specific audience. This model is stable only as long as subscriptions make up the bulk of the content providers’ revenue. Because consumers prefer content that is tailored to their interest, and so long as they provide the bulk of the revenue, content providers have strong economic incentives to satisfy their preferences. In the early days of a medium’s evolution, the audience is still too small to attract the attention of advertisers, so consumers are still the content producers’ primary source of revenue. Thus, the differentiated market model prevails; and the question becomes what/who determines the lines along which a medium’s market segments. The answer is early adopters.

The unique characteristics of early adopters make them key to the success of the differentiated market model. Early adopters make up 12.5% of the population. The primary characteristic of early adopters is a desire for respect. Where innovators are

46 BAKER, supra note 20, at 9

47 BAKER, supra note 20, at 9; see also James N. Rosse, The Decline of Direct Newspaper Competition, 30 JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATIONS 65 (1980).

48 For the unique characteristics of innovators see ROGERS, supra note 41, at 283
cosmopolites, early adopters are localities who enjoy central positions in their local social networks. Moreover, early adopters also exhibit high degrees of opinion leadership.

Given the importance of market segmentation and the unique characteristics of early adopters, it is easy to understand why, in the second phase of commercialization, a new medium’s business model shifts to selling consumers to politicians and civil society actors. While the key difference between this phase and the previous phase is the influence of civil-society actors on content production, it is not necessarily the case that civil-society actors provide the majority of the revenue for content producers. Rather, in this phase, content producers are motivated by more than economic concerns. They wish to serve their community and are concerned primarily with advancing their group’s interests. Their goals include providing a forum for their preferred civil-society actors. Consumers in this phase also place a high value on information that is relevant to their groups. This information allows them to maintain their positions of opinion leadership and the group’s respect. Thus, given the motivations of early adopters, the market will segment in response to their preferences. In one sense this segmentation is an ‘authentic’ segmentation, given its emergent nature.49.

The next group to adopt an innovation is the early majority. The early majority is characterized by its deliberateness. Members of the early majority don’t hold positions of leadership nor do they hold central positions in social networks. However, “they provide

49 BAKER, supra note 20, at 181
interconnectedness in the system’s interpersonal networks."\textsuperscript{50} They aren’t as well educated, or as well off, as the early adopter or innovators. Finally, and most importantly, the early majority is the largest adaptor category—constituting more than third of a society.

The characteristics of the early majority can cause the dominant business model within an industry to shift. The key factor here is the size of this group. The shift to the early majority marks the point at which a medium has a large enough audience to attract advertisers’ subsidies. They expect the marginal return of the advertisement to be greater than the marginal cost of producing and distributing that advertisement. Because members of the early majority don’t enjoy as close ties to civil-society actors as early adopters; producers are more inclined to turn to advertisers to help support their production efforts.

Once advertising-supported content enters a medium’s industry it will drive out the differentiated content of the previous phase.\textsuperscript{51} As the audience for a medium increases, advertising subsides will grow large enough so that advertising supported content is cheaper than differentiated content,\textsuperscript{52} and a feedback loop will develop that will push non-advertising support content to extinction or marginality. As advertising subsidizes grow larger, content producers have an incentive (the promise of larger

\textsuperscript{50} ROGERS, \textit{supra} note 41, at 284

\textsuperscript{51} C. EDWIN BAKER \textit{ADVERTISING AND A DEMOCRATIC PRESS} 73 (1994)

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Id.} at 23
advertising revenues) to reinvest a large portion of their revenue into content in an attempt to attract more members of an advertisers target audience. Content producers can do this by either making content cheaper, or by making it more appealing. In either case, such an investment will motivate some consumers of differentiated content to switch to advertiser-supported content. This results in reduced revenues for differentiated content producers. As their revenues fall, these content producers will be forced to either increase the price of their product or to produce a less appealing one—causing more consumers to switch to advertiser-supported content. Baker describes this economic phenomenon as it relates to newspapers, “[t]he advertising-supported paper’s entry into competition causes a leftward shift in the demand curve for the differentiated, reader-supported papers. This leftward shift could result in the downward-sloping average cost curves’ being constantly above, no long crossing, these papers’ demand curves.”53

As the differentiated content of the previous phase is driven out of the market place, it will be replaced with content that adheres to the segmentation preferences of advertisers.54 As Baker notes “what they [advertisers] primarily pay for, is ‘audience,’ usually a somewhat targeted audience.” The introduction of advertiser-supported content does not mitigate the fact that the only way multiple content producers can survive is if they offer a differentiated product.55 However, now that the dominant source of revenue

---

53 Id. at 73

54 Id. at 25

55 The loss of segmentation due to changes in advertiser preferences could explain the prevelance of monopoly content providers in many industries/markets see James N. Rosse, The Decline of Direct Newspaper Competition, 30 JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATIONS 65 (1980).
is advertising, content producers will attempt to differentiate their products in response to the preferences of advertisers.

The segmentation preferences of advertisers are toxic to the public sphere. Baker notes that, “possibly advertisers’ most important impact on the media is to increase the prevalence of media content relevant to their favored audiences.”56 This is detrimental for two reasons: (1) the audiences favored by advertisers don’t correspond to authentic group interests and identities57; and (2) there are large segments of society that are not favored by advertisers.58 Because advertiser segmentation “neither necessarily nor uniformly reflects or responds to individuals’ or groups’ diverse concerns or interests”59 it undermines the ability of a medium to support ethical discourse—which requires discursive segmentation.60 Since, advertisers are not equally interested in all members of society; the media will inevitably under serve certain populations. This undermines the ability of a medium to support moral discourse—which requires inclusivity.

56 Baker, supra note 20, at 27

57 Id. at 181

58, Id. at 178

59 Id. at 181

60 Id.
CHAPTER THREE: THE AMERICAN NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY

The previous chapter presented the argument that media industries undergo a process of commercialization, and at the end of that process their ability to support the public sphere is greatly diminished. The goal of this chapter is to ground that argument in history, to show that it is a plausible theory. More specifically, this chapter examines the American newspaper industry within the analytical framework presented in the last chapter. It proceeds in two parts: the first part is a history of the newspaper industry that shows that the newspaper industry underwent the process of commercialization described in the previous chapter; the second part argues that the newspaper’s industry’s ability to support the public sphere has been greatly diminished.

3.1 The Commercialization of the Newspaper Industry

The process of commercialization for media industries proceeds in three phases. These phases are best demarcated by shifts in the business models utilized by a medium’s industry. Initially, a new medium’s industry focuses on selling information and cultural artifacts to the public. Over time, its business model shifts to selling the public to politicians and civil society actors. Finally, its business model evolves into selling the public to advertisers.

1Here it is argued that the American newspaper industry did, at some point in its life, support the public sphere. For a contrary discussion see Michael Schudson, Was There Ever a Public Sphere? If So, When? Reflections on the American Case, in HAMBERMAS AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE 143 (Craig Clahoun ed., 1992)
Natural processes of diffusion and adoption cause the shifts between the various business models. Diffusion theory tells us that all individuals in a society do not adopt an innovation at the same time; rather at different points different types of people adopt an innovation. Diffusion theory identifies five idealized adopter categories into which most people fall: (1) innovators, (2) early adopters, (3) early majority; (4) late majority; (5) laggards. The phases of commercialization described above entail shifts between the first three of these categories: innovators, early adopters, and the early majority. Each adopter category has a distinct socioeconomic status, a distinct set of personality attributes, and distinct communication behavior. These characteristics, in conjunction with economics of the industry, can explain the progression of business models.

Thus, to argue that a medium has completed the process of commercialization the beginning of each phase must be identified. This can be done by examining the history of the medium to look for the key points at which the shifts between business models and adopter categories occurred. It is necessary to show that the key actors in the industry in each phase have the appropriate socioeconomic status, personality attributes, and communication behavior as well to show that the business model is the appropriate one for that phase. To that end, each of the following sections proceeds as follows: first a history of each phase that highlights key players, practices and events is presented; second a general profile of newspaper publishers and newspaper readers in that phase is

---

constructed and compared with the theoretical profile provided by diffusion theory; third sources of revenue and other relevant economic facts are discussed.  

3.1.1 Phase 1: 1690-1765

In general, there are two possible business models for media industries: (1) selling information and cultural goods (content) to consumers; and (2) selling the attention of consumers to a third party by providing the third party with the ability to distribute information to consumers. Most media industries blend these two models. However, one tends to dominate in terms of percentage of revenue. Due to the small size of the market in the first phase of a medium’s development, the second business model is infeasible. This leaves only the first business model.

Those who adopt a medium in this phase are referred to as innovators. The primary characteristic of innovators is venturesomeness. Their interests in new ideas often lead them outside their local peer networks. As a result, they tend to have cosmopolite social networks, and are often friends or acquaintances of other innovators. As a general rule earlier adopters are better educated, and have a higher social status than later adopters. However, successful innovators need more than education and exposure to new ideas. Chief among the perquisites for a successful innovator is access to significant financial resources. These financial resources help innovators absorb loses from

---

3For general histories of the American newspaper industry see; FRANK L. MOTT, AMERICAN JOURNALISM 7(3rd ed. 1962); JAMES M. LEE, HISTORY OF AMERICAN JOURNALISM (1917)
unprofitable innovations. The first 2.5% of a population to adopt an innovation generally fits this profile. 4

The first phase of commercialization in the American newspaper industry 5 began with the publication of Bejamin Harris’ Publick Occurrences 6 in Boston and ended with the passage of the Stamp Act. Despite the fact that only one issue was printed before the colonial government abolished it, Publick Occurrences was the first newspaper published in the American colonies. Between the publication of Publick Occurrences and the passage of the stamp act, newspapers were successfully established in all but two colonies. Most were relatively apolitical. From time to time political squabbles would arise and publishers would be jailed—but this generally helped a newspaper’s circulation. The passage of the stamp act marked the start of the political period in the history of American newspapers.

Before newspapers appeared in the colonies, news was disseminated through a network of private correspondences. Initially, these correspondences were carried out between “men who had common interests, financial, political or intellectual.” 7 Over time this informal private practice became professionalized.

4ROGERS, supra note 41, at 288


6 LEE, supra note 3, at 9

7MOTT, supra note 3, at 7
In 1704 one of these professional letter writers, John Cambell, published the initial issue of the first continuous American newspaper—*The Boston News-Letter*. His letters were regularly read by the various governors of the New England colonies, and widely circulated among the political elite. When the demand for his letters greatly increased he was forced to utilize the printing press. He printed the first edition of *The Boston News-Letter* on Monday April 24, 1704, using two sides of a half-sheet folio, 7x11½ inches. Generally, two thirds of the paper was taken up by information from Europe, “dealing chiefly with English politics and court and with European wars.” Following the European news were a number of brief items dealing with “the arrival of ships, deaths, sermons, political appointments, storms, Indian depredations, privateering and piracies, counterfeiting, fires, accidents, court actions, and so on.” Finally, a few advertisements would usually appear at the bottom of the last column.

From an economic perspective *The Boston News-Letter* did not do well. It was a luxury good targeted at the literate and well-to-do, a very small market. After seven years of publication Campbell complained that he was unable to sell 250 copies of an issue. Despite the low readership Campbell continued to publish the *News-Letter* until

---

8MOTT, supra note 3, at 11

9 MOTT, supra note 3, at 11

10 Id.

11 MOTT, supra note 3, at 13
1723, at which point he turned the paper over to Bartholomew Green, whose family published the paper until 1762.

By 1721 the market had grown enough to support a second newspaper. John Cambell, in addition to being a letter writer, was postmaster of Boston. In 1719, Cambell was removed from his office, and his successor, William Brooker, feeling that publishing a newspaper was one of the duties of his office, wanted to take over as editor/publisher of the News-Letter. When Campbell refused him, Booker started his own paper the Boston Gazette. The first issue of the Gazette was published on December 21, 1719. When, less than a year later, Booker was replaced as postmaster he turned the Boston Gazette over to his successor. The paper was published by the next five postmasters.

Less than a year after the publication of the Boston Gazette, James Franklin launched a third newspaper in Boston. Franklin had been the printer of the Gazette while Brooker was postmaster. However, when Booker’s successor chose another printer for the Gazette, Franklin, encouraged by a group of wealthy men, published a competing paper, the New England Courant, the first issue of which was released on August 7, 1721. The Courant only lasted five years, and was radically different from the other two papers; it sought to amuse as much as to be informative. It was at the Courant, that Benjamin Franklin whet his appetite for the publishing industry.

Philadelphia was the second colony to support a newspaper. On December 22, 1719 Andrew Bradford established the American Weekly Mercury in Philadelphia. Like

12 MOTT, supra note 3, at 16
Cambell, Bradford was also postmaster of Philadelphia. The *Mercury* stood unopposed until 1728 when James Keimer started *The Universal Instructor in all Arts and Sciences: and Pennsylvania Gazette*. The Gazette compared favorably with the *Mercury*. However, due to the machinations of Benjamin Franklin, Keimer’s stint as its publisher was relatively short lived. Franklin, who at the time was an established printer in Philadelphia, wrote a series of articles for the *Mercury*, the “Busy Body” papers, which satirized Keimer and hastened the demise of the Gazette. Franklin then bought the Gazette from Keimer in the fall of 1729; radically changed its format; and successfully published it until 1766. That year he handed the paper over to David Hall. Hall, his sons, grandsons and various partners published the paper until 1815.

New York was the third colony to give rise to a newspaper. William Bradford, the father of Andrew Bradford, established *The New York Gazette* in 1725. The *New York Gazette* like all early papers had trouble generating sufficient revenue.  

Bradford was only able to keep the Gazette running because of the salary he received as the “Printer to the province of New York”. Unfortunately, his fear of losing that salary turned the Gazette into an organ of the government. As a result, wealthy men who opposed the ruling powers encouraged John Zenger, a poor printer, to start a rival paper. Zenger established *The New-York Weekly Journal* in 1733. Zenger’s paper was surprisingly political and extremely critical of the government. The Journal’s critical view of those in power led to Zenger’s eventual arrest for libel. His trial was a watershed

---

13 LEE, *supra* note 3, at 38
moment in American history. His lawyer, Andrew Hamilton, won Zenger’s acquittal by appealing to the jury’s love of freedom and arguing for the freedom of the press.\textsuperscript{14}

A number of newspapers were launched between 1725 and 1735s. William Parks established \textit{The Maryland Gazette} in 1727. Unfortunately, finding it financially impossible to continue the paper, Parks discontinued it first in 1731 and then after a brief revival again in 1733. In 1730 Eleazer Phillips established \textit{The South Carolina Weekly Journal}. Unable to get enough subscribers, he suspended publication after six months. In 1732, Thomas Whitmarsh established \textit{The South Carolina Gazette}, which managed to survive through multiple owners, titles, suspensions and revivals until 1802. In 1732, James Franklin, the founder of \textit{The New-England Weekly Courant}, left Boston, moved to Newport, Rhode Island and established \textit{The Rhode Island Gazette}, which lasted eight months.

Between 1735 and 1765 the American newspaper industry “matured from a gawky, unsure teenager into a fiery youthful power that saw things from its own perspective.”\textsuperscript{15} By 1765 all the colonies except Delaware and New Jersey had newspapers.\textsuperscript{16} There were four papers in Boston, three in New York, and Philadelphia had two English newspapers and two German language newspapers. Connecticut, Rhode Island, North Carolina, and South Carolina each had two papers. In total there were

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{14} For a discussion of freedom of the press in this era see SLOAN & WILLIAMS, supra note 5, at 73
\textsuperscript{15} SLOAN & WILLIAMS, supra note 5, at 118
\textsuperscript{16} For an accounting of all papers that opened and closed between 1735-1765 see SLOAN & WILLIAMS, supra note 5, at 103-05
\end{flushleft}
twenty-three papers published in 1765.\textsuperscript{17} Sloan and Williams do an excellent job of characterizing this period, as well as capturing the essence of the publisher/editors at the time:

“The colonial press from 1735-1765 was a colorful product of the men and women who forged ahead with a brand news industry, finding guidance first from their own consciences, then from readers, from each other, and from government. Sometimes they felt pressured by outside parties. Sometimes they took advantage of completely new territory to shape the press as they themselves thought it should be. As pioneers in vastly different geographical, governmental and economic environments, colonial printers were forced to figure out what worked best in each individual situation...they had to fight battles and carve their own niches in their various communities in order to survive. From 1735-1765, the American colonial press searched in haphazard directions for prosperity and success."\textsuperscript{18}

Based on historical accounts, we can argue that the newspaper publishers/editors of this era were innovators: they were venturesome, risk tolerant, persistent, had access to significant financial resources, and were members of cosmopolite social networks. They were entrepreneurs and, as it was not uncommon for a publisher to run a number of different businesses and they often held a public position such as postmaster.\textsuperscript{19} They had access to significant financial resources, either through revenue from their various

\textsuperscript{17} MOTT, supra note 3, at 43

\textsuperscript{18} SLOAN & WILLIAMS, supra note 5, at 98

businesses or through their relationships with the moneyed elite. These financial resources were very necessary because starting a newspaper was a risky business. Many newspapers failed but almost all faced significant financial problems. Newspaper publishers of the era were cosmopolitan as evidenced by their friendships with each other and with the elite, as well as by the primacy that the publishers and readers of this day accorded to news from Europe.

It can also be argued that the newspaper readers of this era were also innovators. They were professionals, politicians, and entrepreneurs. They were well educated and moneyed, with strong personal and professional ties to Europe. 20 In some cases, these early readers were also authors. Not surprisingly, early newspaper publishers often relied on their readers to regularly contribute material; and many readers did—they would pass on correspondences from friends and associates in Europe for publication and/or write articles on social and political matters. 21

By relying on their readers, each other, and foreign newspaper publishers for content, early newspaper publishers were able to control their first-copy costs. During this era it was common for master-printers to print and edit their own newspapers to supplement their printing business. Although they did not regularly write for their newspapers, they would occasionally pen an editorial or a short local news items. 22

20 MOTT, supra note 3, at 12
21 MOTT, supra note 3, at 47
22 Id.
rest of the material was compiled from foreign newspapers, correspondence that the editors/publishers or their associates received, other colonial newspapers, contributions from their readers, government announcements and advertisements.

While advertising existed, it accounted for a small portion of a papers’ revenues. There were very few advertisements in the earliest papers; but by the middle of the eighteenth century successful printers were able to fill three to five full pages with advertisements.23 The most successful paper of the era, The Pennsylvania Gazette, generated, between 1748 and 1766, a third of its revenue from advertising.24

The vast majority of the revenues of these early newspapers were from selling subscriptions. Newspapers were considered luxury goods and purchased primarily by the well-educated, moneyed elite. Early in this period, many newspaper publishers had trouble getting subscribers, much less getting them to pay up. It was not uncommon for publishers to take their payments in livestock, fuel, or other goods. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the circulation of newspapers constantly increased during this phase. By 1765, it is estimated that five percent of the white families in the colonies received a newspaper weekly.25

23 MOTT, supra note 3, at 56
24 LEE, supra note 3, at 35
25 MOTT, supra note 3, at 59 (“This is on the basis of somewhat less than one and a half million white population, and an aggregate newspaper circulation of about 14,000 weekly” Id. at 59 ft. nt. 34).
3.1.2 Phase 2: 1765-1833

During the second phase of commercialization a medium becomes political, its primary business becomes selling the public to civil society actors. However, civil society actors do not necessarily provide the majority of the revenue for content producers. Rather, in this phase, content producers are motivated by more than economic concerns. Their aim is to serve their community and advance their group’s interests by providing a forum for their preferred civil-society actors. Consumers in this phase also place a high value on information relevant to their groups.

In this phase the profile of adopters shifts from that of innovator to that of early adopters. Early adopters make up 12.5% of the population. Their primary trait is a desire for respect. Where innovators are cosmopolites, early adopters are localities who enjoy central positions in their local social networks. Moreover, early adopters also exhibit high degrees of opinion leadership.26

It is convenient to signal the beginning of the second phase of commercialization with the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765 and to demarcate its end with the publication of the first of the penny press. By 1765, more than 5% of the white population of the colonies subscribed to newspapers. From the perspective of diffusion theory, this percentage indicates that the shift from innovators to early adopters was well underway; likewise this percentage indicates that the shift from the first phase to second phase of commercialization was also well underway. Historically, the first evidence of this

26 ROGERS, supra note 41, at 283
transition is the response of the colonial newspapers to the stamp act. As the colonial opposition to the Revolutionary War took shape, the newspaper industry segmented along political lines—the Loyalist/Patriot divide. After the War a new batch of newspapers arose, which were divided along Federalist/Republican lines. Even as the Federalists faded from the public scene, the press’ political orientation remained. New parties founded new newspapers or enlisted the support of old ones.

Until the revolutionary period had begun to take shape, newspapers were apolitical for the most part. Some notable exceptions included The New England Courrant and The New York Weekly-Journal; both of which were started by opponents of the colonial governments and served as vehicles for their views. Yet, as Mott notes, the vast majority of newspapers remained apolitical:

The publication of news from abroad continued to be regarded generally as the chief business of a newspaper; but as the struggle against England developed, American political affairs took on more and more importance. Five years before the first musket-shots of the War reverberated in the hills around Lexington, there were a few papers which frankly placed politics first and which allowed contributed articles dealing with the growing resistance against English authority to crowd out the news from the London papers.”27

The Stamp Act catalyzed the entry of the press into the political realm. It required that all legal documents, official papers, books, and newspapers be printed on stamped paper, which carried a special tax. For newspapers, “this tax amounted to a half-penny

27 MOTT, supra note 3, at 71
for each copy of a two-page paper and one penny for four pages. In addition there was a
tax of two shillings on each advertisement. ²⁸ By the standards of its day, this was a high
tax.

The Stamp Act was passed by the English parliament in March, 1765 and took
effect the following November. The newspaper men utilized this lag to organize a
virtually unanimous resistance to the act. Moreover, newspapers began to publish “full
accounts of the proceedings of all the colonial legislatures, town meetings, and other
bodies which protested against the Act.”²⁹ When, in the summer of 1865, the names of
tax-collectors were announced, newspapers “printed stories of mobs which hanged these
men in effigy, intimidated them, and caused them to resign.”³⁰ With the arrival of the
stamped paper, newspaper recounted stories of its destruction by mobs. This orchestrated
effort had the intended effect; for when the day came for the Act to go into effect no one
dared to distribute the stamped paper. Even after the Stamp Act’s implementation, not a
single paper in the colonies appeared on stamped paper.³¹ Most papers evaded the law
“by issuing their weekly numbers without serial number or imprint, and sometimes
without the regular nameplate, thus changing their status technically from that of
newspaper to broadsides or handbills.”³² The Stamp Act was repealed in 1766.

²⁸ Id.
²⁹ Id.
³⁰ Id. at 72
³¹ Id. at 74
³² Id.
The Stamp Act’s repeal was quickly followed by the Townshend Acts. These Acts, passed in June and July of 1767, imposed taxes on tea, paper, wines, glass, lead, and paint. The Townshend Acts were formulated to respond to the American arguments against the Stamp Act. For, during the Stamp Act crisis, the colonist had accepted the legality of indirect taxes, such as taxes on imports, while they rejected the legality of direct taxation without representation. Thus, Britain began taxing imports.33

In response to the Townshend Acts, the colonists formed “The Association” and organized a boycott of British goods. Merchants were coaxed or intimidated into agreeing not to import English goods.34 Organizing such a boycott required the support of the press, and the newspapers played their parts. As Mott notes, “the papers were full of proceedings of meetings in which the various agreements were adopted, accounts of the methods used to enforce them, black-lists of merchants who had imported goods contrary to their agreements, and accusations against violators as well as defenses of them.”35

However, in contrast to the opposition to the Stamp Act, the public’s response to the Townshend Acts was far from united. Nor were newspapers of one voice on the issue. This split in opinion marked the first systematic segmentation of the press. Printers found it hard to remain impartial as passions rose and papers were labeled by

33 SLOAN & WILLIAMS, supra note 5, at 148

34 Id. at 152

35 MOTT, supra note 3, at 75
virtue of their position. Eventually, all papers not fully committed to the Patriot cause were considered loyalist. As the revolutionary war drew nearer, almost all the loyalist papers were driven out of business. New loyalist papers were started, and old ones revived in towns occupied by the British. However, when the Americans won back these towns, these papers were driven out of business.

The Boston Gazette was primary among the Patriot press. The printers of the Gazette were Benjamin Edes and John Gill. The writers were members of the Caucus Club, “a small and purposely obscure organization designed to control political action,” whose members included, Samuel Adams, his cousin, John Adams, Joseph Warren, Josiah Quincy, Thomas Cushing, Samuel Cooper, and James Otis. This group constantly met in the offices of the Gazette to write and strategize. Acting in a new role, newspaper publishers were now expected to perform a networking function—introducing like minded patriots to each other, a role that is in keeping with the profile of early adopters as central nodes in their social networks.

In addition to being ardent advocates for independence, the publishers and writers of the Boston Gazette played a major role in organizing the infamous Boston Tea Party. On December 16, 1773 a group of angry Bostonians met at Edes’ home and then migrated to the offices of the Boston Gazette where they donned Indian costumes. They

36 MOTT, supra note 3, at 76

37 Id. at 77

38 Linda Garcia, Communication Policy: An Organizational Field Perspective (Unpublished Manuscript)
then hurried to the city wharf, boarded several tea ships, and threw £15,000 worth of East India Company tea overboard. Parliament’s heavy handed response to this incident catalyzed the Patriot cause.

Naturally, the Revolutionary War affected the newspaper industry. Various papers were discontinued, suspended, revived, and started as the war raged and fortunes shifted. On April 19, 1775—the day of the first military engagements of the revolutionary war at Lexington and Concord—there were a total of thirty-seven newspapers published. Twenty of these papers survived the war, although many were suspended at some point during the fighting. Eighteen new papers were founded but failed, while fifteen new papers managed to survive the war. Of the seventy papers published, fifteen were loyalist for part of their existence. When the war ended, thirty-five papers were in publication.39

The Newspaper industry grew quickly and changed drastically in the years after the revolution.40 Many of the pre-revolutionary papers ceased to exist, and others began the march into obscurity. Nevertheless, there was explosive growth in the newspaper industry. Between the end of the revolutionary war and 1833, the number of newspapers published in the United States rose from thirty-five to over 1200.41

39 MOTT, supra note 3, at 95

40 For a history of the newspaper industry between the end of the revolutionary war and the rise of the penny press see CAROL SUE HUMPHREY, THE PRESS OF THE YOUNG REPUBLIC, 1783-1833 (1996)

41 HUMPHREY, supra note 40, at 156
Understandably, the party press arose in the 1790’s in concert with America’s first political parties: the Federalists and the Republicans. Political leaders, having witnessed the power of newspapers during the period leading up to the revolution, began to utilize newspapers to promote their interests. In 1789 John Fenno established the *Gazette of the United States*, the first Federalist Party newspaper. In 1791 Philip Freneau published the *National Gazette*, the first Republican Party newspaper. Additional publications followed, as prominent members of both parties helped found papers in major cities throughout the United States. As a result, the number of newspapers increased from 92 in 1790 to 234 in 1800.

With the disappearance of the Federalist Party from national politics, following the war of 1812, the party press of the 1790’s changed in its specifics but not its character. The press remained extremely political and partisan; however, the parties changed. Due to a long series of political miscalculations that began with the Alien and Sedition Act and ended with their opposition to the war of 1812, the Federalist Party faded from the national political scene. In its wake, multiple political parties formed at both the national and local level. Each of these enlisted the support of existing papers when possible. When they were unable to find a suitable paper, they simply started one.

In the 1820’s a new two party system emerged and the structure of the political press changed to mirror that system. The rise of Andrew Jackson to national prominence

---

42 *Id.* at 42
43 *Id.* at 42
marks the beginning of this period, because “people began to divide along the lines of whether they were for or against Andrew Jackson.”\textsuperscript{44} Those who favored Jackson formed the Democratic Party while those who were opposed to him established the Whig Party. Newspapers quickly choose sides. At the same time, in areas where the new parties felt they didn’t have a suitable voice they established new newspapers.\textsuperscript{45}

The editors of this period fit the profile of early adopters. The separation of the role of printer and editor, a key structural development of this period, indicates that the editors of this period saw themselves as opinion leaders. Whereas the printers of the previous period seldom wrote anything for their newspapers, the editors of this period spent much of their energy writing political essays meant to influence and mobilize voters. The papers of this period focused on local news, as opposed to the European orientation of the newspapers of the previous period. This indicates that the editors and readers of this period were localities. Furthermore, the editors of this phase routinely held important positions in their party’s apparatus. As Baldasty notes they “were extensively involved in politics outside of their newspaper offices. They served as central committee members, public speakers, and organizers of meetings and conventions.”\textsuperscript{46} This also indicates that they held key positions in their social networks. Finally, few editors of the period became wealthy due to their newspapers, but many did

\textsuperscript{44}\textit{Humphrey, supra} note 40, at 118

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Id.} at 118

\textsuperscript{46}\textit{Gerald J. Baldasty, The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century} 30 (1992)
become powerful and earn a great deal of respect within their communities and parties. For example, Francis Preston Blair, a noted newspaper owner and editor, was “a key confidant and political advisor to President Jackson and the key link between the president and many members of the party.” 47 Blair rise to power was not accidental as Baldasty notes, “[Blair was] interested in the occupation of journalism only as it promoted the political goals he supported.”48

Given their interest in politics, it was natural for editors to view readers as voters, and to strive to woo and mobilize them.49 Editors presented news and opinion that supported their causes,50 encouraged enfranchised men to become active in politics51 by printing “announcements of forthcoming conventions and meeting from the local to the state level…Obviously, not all readers attended such meetings, and consequently newspapers devoted a lot of space to the proceedings and discussion of party meetings, reporting speeches and resolutions.”52 Historians routinely characterize politics, replete with parades and barbecues, as being America’s pastime during this period. By and large, people voted in solidarity with their ethnic and religious communities.53

47 Id. at 32
48 Id. at 32
49 Id. at 25
50 Id. at 26
51 Id. at 28
52 Id.
53 SCHUDSON, supra note 1, at 155
Nevertheless, if one were to read newspapers side by side they “approximated some form of rational-critical discourse.” This indicates, they were not targeted at the mass of voters—rather they were targeted at the small group of readers who helped formulate Party positions. Furthermore, only the relatively affluent could afford to purchase newspapers regularly and to regularly participate in politics. Thus, the readers of this period could be characterized as early-adopters.

The political parties supported these efforts by providing financial subsidies. Thus, the business model of the press in this phase was selling the public to civil-society actors. Despite the rapid growth of the newspaper industry, it was still a notoriously unstable business. Thus, early on politicians found that they had to provide editors with financial assistance. For example, Hamilton provided direct financial support to Fenno’s *Gazette of the United States* and Jefferson, then Secretary of State, provided financial support to Freneau’s *National Gazette* by offering Freaneau a job as translator for the State Department.

As the political press matured political subsidies became an increasingly large portion of newspapers’ revenues. By the 1830’s, it is estimated that, partisan subsidies were responsible for half or more of newspaper’s income. Partisan subsidies were particularly important in rural areas where advertisers and subscribers, advertisements

---

54 *Id.* at 155

55 HUMPHREY, *supra* note 40, at 51
and cash were scare.\textsuperscript{56} Outside of metropolitan areas many editors were forced to take their subscriptions fees in the form of farm products or other goods. Unfortunately, these goods were of little use in buying the supplies necessary to run a newspaper. Thus, the cash provided by partisan subsidies was crucial. In fact, partisan subsidies were responsible for the presence of multiple competing newspapers in many small towns across America.

These partisan subsidies came in many forms. The largest subsidies came in the form of patronage contracts—contracts awarded to newspaper producers to print various government documents. Another significant form of subsidy were patronage jobs—easy, well paying jobs that left newspaper producers with plenty of time to work on their newspapers. These jobs and contracts came from all levels and branches of government.\textsuperscript{57} When political parties lacked the political control necessary to award contracts and dole out jobs, they subsidized newspaper editors through donations, loans, advertisements, and in some cases outright ownership.

While these subsidies were not large, they were crucial to the newspapers’ survival. As Baldasty notes, “[f]ew editors would become rich or even financially comfortable through the patronage system; for most it was merely a life-sustaining subsidy.”\textsuperscript{58} Due to the critical nature of these subsidies, one might argue that patronage

\textsuperscript{56} \textsc{Baldasty, supra} note 46, at 19

\textsuperscript{57} For a discussion of subsidies see \textsc{Baldasty, supra} note 46, at 19; \textit{see also} W.A. Katz, \textit{An Episode in Patronage: Federal Laws Published in Newspapers}, 10 \textsc{The American Journal of Legal History} 214 (1966)

\textsuperscript{58} \textsc{Baldasty, supra} note 46, at 34
limited press content. However, most editors were themselves party activists, so financial control does not appear to have been a major factor in this regard.59

3.1.3 Phase 3: 1833 –

In the third phase of commercialization content producers sell the public to advertisers. The shift to this phase of commercialization results in the loss of differentiated content. As the audience for a medium increases, advertising subsides grow large enough so that advertising supported content is cheaper than differentiated content, and a feedback loop develops that pushes non-advertising support content to extinction or marginality. As the differentiated content of the previous phase is driven out of the marketplace, it will be replaced with content that adheres to the segmentation preferences of advertisers.60

The shift to the final phase of commercialization occurs when the audience for a medium grows large enough that a medium becomes attractive to advertisers. This occurs when the profile of new adopters switch from that of early adopter to early majority. Roughly a third of society can be classified as members of the early majority. Their primarily characteristic is deliberateness. They do not hold positions of leadership

59 Id. at 34

60 For a discussion of the effects of advertising on media content see C. Edwin Baker, Media Markets and Democracy 25-30 (2002)
nor do they hold central positions in social networks. They aren’t as well educated or as well off as the early adopters and innovators.61

The rise of the penny press in 1833 marks the beginning of the third phase of commercialization.62 The first penny paper was Benjamin H. Day’s New York Sun. The publication of this paper marks the beginning of a shift in the American Newspaper industry away from the partisan and mercantile press to a commercial press. This transformation began in 1833, picked up speed after the civil war, and continues today.

Prior to publication of The New York Sun, elites produced newspapers for other elites. These papers were “filled with information for specific elite groups of readers: merchants got up-to-date commodity prices and shipping information, while politicians and their partisans read political essays and announcements of party events.”63 These papers were generally delivered to their wealthy subscribers at home or at work at a rate of six cents an issue. The editors of these papers were often partisans who viewed their newspapers as a means to a political end. Political parties usually subsidized these newspapers. All of this changed with the publication of The New York Sun.

On September 3, 1833 Benjamin H. Day published the first edition of The New York Sun and sold it for a penny a copy. In doing so he brought the newspaper to the masses. Day was quick to realize that the mass audience didn’t want political content.

61 ROGERS, supra note 41, at 284

62 For a history of the early portion of this phase see WILLIAM E. HUNTZICKER, THE POPULAR PRESS, 1833-1865 (1999); MENAHEM BLONDHEIM, NEWS OVER THE WIRES (1994); see also BALDASTY, supra note 46;

63 HUNTZICKER, supra note 62, at 1
So the Sun was filled with “stories of ordinary people confronting life in the big city.” Day also understood that mass audiences could not afford subscriptions, so he adopted the distribution system of the London newspapers. He sold his papers to distributors, who hired boys and unemployed men to sell the newspapers on the street to the common folk. Finally, unlike the editors of the party press, Day had no strong ties to politics nor was he interested in developing any. Day’s purpose in starting a paper “was merely to create a profitable adjunct to his printing business.” He viewed the Sun as a commercial venture not a political enterprise. He even turned his lack of political affiliation into an asset, promising readers that he would accept no subsidy except from advertising. The Sun quickly became a success; in two months it had a circulation of 2,000, in five months 5,000. Once Benjamin Day showed that a profitable business could be built by selling newspapers for a penny, New York competitors emerged at a break neck pace; and imitators popped up in every major city within a few years.

A key innovation of the penny press was tying circulation to advertising rates. When the Sun first started, Day copied his ads from competing six-penny papers, listing ships cleared to depart and those that had arrived—a traditional form of advertising and

---

64 Id.
65 Id.
66 MOTT, supra note 3, at 222
67 HUNTZICKER, supra note 62, at 2
68 MOTT, supra note 3, at 228
69 HUNTZICKER, supra note 62 at 10; BLONDHEIM, supra note 62, at 24;
news. 70 Over time Day’s ads took on a distinctive flavor. The Sun began selling advertisements to patent medicine vendors. Want ads from individuals began to appear. Local museums and theaters advertised regularly. Marriage and death notices, originally a source of news, also became a source of revenue.71 At this stage the penny papers had “traded subsidies from a few influential readers for large volumes of small ads carrying people’s wants and needs.”72 As the circulation of the penny press increased, the proprietors of the penny press tied their advertising rates to their circulation. By 1840, the Journal of Commerce a prestigious six-penny paper charged $60 a year for a certain amount of space; by contrast the Herald a high circulation penny-paper charged $1000 a year for a similar amount of space.73

The industrial revolution, which took place in America after the civil war, drastically increased the importance of advertising. The industrial revolution “transformed the United States from a country of small isolated communities scattered across 3 million miles of continental territory into a compact economic and industrial unit.”74 Prior to the civil war, production output was small and distribution limited to a fairly narrow region. As Baldasty notes, “a small advertisement in the local newspaper

70 Id. at 7
71 Id. at 8
72 Id.
73 BLONDHEIM, supra note 62, at 25
74 BALDASTY, supra note 46, at 53
could alert most in the country about goods made by a local cobbler, for instance.” 75

However, with the adoption of mass-production technologies local markets were no longer sufficient. For example, “[t]he village cobbler in 1820 or 1830 had but 8-10 pairs of shoes to sell at any one time, but the shoe manufacturer in late-century New England could easily produce hundreds of pairs of shoes a week.”76 Mass-production required producers to exert themselves to induce customers to purchase their goods. They had to expand their markets beyond the local to the regional, national and, in some cases, the international.

To expand their markets producers turned to the leading mass media of the day—newspapers and magazines. The growth in newspaper circulation caused by the advent of the penny paper provided advertisers with broad and relatively cheap access to most American consumers. As Blondheim notes, “[a]dvertisers who realized the great power of the cheap press to promote products and services among the rapidly growing population of urban centers ultimately footed the bills for operating expenses as well as allowing enormous profits for penny press proprietors.”77 The percentage of newspaper and magazine revenue from advertising increased at a rate of about 5% per decade between 1879 and 1929. It is estimated that in 1879 advertising accounted for 44 % of

75 Id. at 53

76 Id.

77 BLONDHEIM, supra note 62, at 25
newspaper and magazine revenue. By 1929 it is estimated to have constituted 70.9% of newspaper and magazine revenue.  

As the importance of advertising as a source of revenue increased advertisers were able to exert increasing levels of control over newspapers. As Baldasty notes, “[advertisers] cared little about the news function of the press and sought, instead, to assure that newspapers served their own marketing needs. They provided much of the news-papers’ revenues and profits, and, in turn, expected a great press to help them when possible.” Advertisers exerted both direct and indirect influence on newspapers. In terms of indirect influence, advertisers encouraged papers to expand their circulation and to target certain key demographics. Newspaper publishers found that they could increase their circulation by making their content a-political and diversified. In terms of demographics, newspaper publishers tried to find content that appealed to higher income groups. One interesting side effect of this was the rise of content directed at women. Recognizing, that women were the primary purchasers for most households, advertisers encouraged papers to develop content which attracted female readers. In terms of direct effects, many newspapers of the late 19th century and early 20th century tended to blur the lines between advertising and news. For example, advertisers would provide papers with

78 C. EDWIN BAKER, ADVERTISING AND A DEMOCRATIC PRESS  20 (1994)

79 BALDASTY, supra note 46, at 60

80 Id. at 65
reading notices—advertisements that masqueraded as news. As journalistic norms evolved, this practice became less prevalent or subtler—depending on your perspective.

In part due to the ascendance of advertising, the partisan press of the antebellum period was quickly driven to extinction by the penny press. In the antebellum period partisan editors managed to remain competitive with the penny press, “[c]ompetitive pressures forced editors to position themselves differently from their competitors while ingratiating themselves with groups of readers and other allies. Some editors continued to work with factions of political parties, while other allied with new sponsors such as regions and towns promoting settlement.”81 This situation changed after the Civil War, a change that Baldasty argues was due to four closely interrelated factors: (1)”first the nature of politics within American life changed;”82 (2) “new vision arose about what journalism could and should do;”83 (3) “urbanization created the need for a press that not only served the male political world but also reported on the wider world;”84 and (4) “advertisers became the key constituency of the press when newspapers emerged as an integral part of the market campaigns of American business.”85 According to Baldasty these four factors are closely intertwined: “[u]rbanization was a major manifestation of the new industrial society. The penny press of the 1830s and 1840s was distinctly an

81 HUNTZICKER, supra note 62, at 28

82 BALDASTY, supra note 46, at 37

83 Id. at 37

84 Id.

85 Id. at 38
urban phenomenon. The decline of the popular fascination with politics can be seen as a corollary to the urban-based growth of recreational activist...Advertising reflects the rise of a consumer-based society.\textsuperscript{86}

As advertising came to account for a greater and greater portion of newspaper revenue, newspaper competition began to decline.\textsuperscript{87} If one defines competition in terms of the percentage of newspapers competing against another daily in the same city, this decline began in 1880. In 1880 61.4\% of newspapers competed against another daily. By 1930 only 20.6\% of newspapers competed against another daily. By 1986 only 1.9\% of newspapers competed against another daily. If one defines competition in terms of towns with separately owned and operated paper the decline has been in evidence since 1910. In 1910 there were 689 towns in the United States with separately owned and operated newspapers. By 1989 there were 26.\textsuperscript{88}

The early editors of the penny press perfectly fit the profile of the early majority. They were a deliberate, careful lot:

“Day went into his business carefully, beginning with job printing, and like many of his contemporaries, he created the newspaper to boost his printing trade. Nevertheless, he took newspaper experience to the venture. Day had worked at the week \textit{Springfield Republican}...the \textit{Evening Post}...the

\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{87} \textsc{Baker, supra} note 78, at 18

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Id.}
They did not have extensive political or social connections, “[a]s a group, the proprietors of the first penny papers did not belong to the social elite of New York. Most were practical printers, a vocation that had no claim to social prominence. Characteristically, they were not well connected, either economically or politically.” Nor did they have access to significant financial resources, “early penny press proprietors could not expect much financial aid from commercial circle or support form influential politicians. With precious few reserves of capital, their newspapers had to become viable commercial enterprises if they were to survive the first few weeks of publication.”

The early readers of penny newspapers were also members of the early majority. They were common, working men and women. As Mott notes the penny press, “[made] newspaper readers of a whole economic class which the six-cent dailies had scarcely touched.” While these were not rich folks, they were not necessarily poor either. After the civil war, advertiser preferences ensured that the target audience of the newspapers was the middle class.

During this phase the newspaper industry shifted from a political to a commercial business model. The penny press of the 1820’s and 1830’s laid the groundwork for the

89 HUNTZICKER, supra note 62, at 2
90 BLONDHEIM, supra note 62, at 20
91 BLONDHEIM, supra note 62, at 21
92 MOTT, supra note 3, at 241
explosive growth in advertising that followed the Civil War. The shift to a commercial model occurred after the Civil-War and is evidenced by the dramatic increase in advertising as a percentage of newspaper and magazine revenue. As the conceptual framework predicts, the rise of the commercial model eliminated the differentiated content of the previous phase. The decline of competition in the newspaper industry that began in the late 19th century and continues today is evidence of the final prediction of the conceptual framework—that the media will adopt the segmentation preferences of advertisers. When multiple content producers within the same market compete for the same audiences only one will survive.

3.2 **The Newspaper Industry and the Public Sphere**

The newspaper industry does not support public sphere, due to the wide spread adoption of advertiser segmentation preferences. The previous section argued that the newspaper industry has undergone a process of commercialization; which culminated with the newspaper industry’s adoption of a business model of selling the public to advertisers. This section argues that as advertiser influence has grown since the late 19th century. The newspaper industry has increasingly modified its content to suit the preferences of advertisers. In particular, since advertisers are more interested in reaching certain audiences than others, the newspaper industry has come to target those audiences by creating content that speaks to their interests. Furthermore, in order to maximize profit, the newspaper industry has begun to actively curtail circulation among less
preferred segments. As a result the newspaper industry is unable to support either ethical or moral discourse. Thus, the newspaper industry does not support the public sphere.

The public sphere is the social network that emerges when a public engages in discourse. Discourse is communication oriented toward ascertaining the validity of a claim.93 There are three forms of discourse, ethical, moral and pragmatic. Pragmatic discourse deals with the “means for realizing goals and preferences that are already given.”94 Moral discourse deals with questions of justice. These question are not specific to a single group, rather they affect society as a whole. In moral discourse the “outcome turns on arguments showing that the interests embodied in contested norms are unreservedly universalizable.”95 Ethical discourses are aimed at achieving self-understanding. In such discourses, “the participants want to get a clear understanding of themselves as members of a specific nation, as members of a local community, as inhabitants of a region and so on.”96

Early democracies were small enough both in terms of geography and population that a vibrant public sphere could be built upon face-to-face interactions.97 In contrast,
the size of modern democracies requires that the public sphere be brought together through the media. 98 While the media is required to expand the public sphere beyond the realm of face-to-face interactions, the media’s ability to support the public sphere is as much a function of its ability to promote discourse as its ability to reach large numbers of people. 99 To support pragmatic discourse, the media must, in a comprehensive and balanced manner, present the problem under consideration, the applicable norms, values and decision rules, and the various solutions to the public. To support moral discourse the media must first and foremost be inclusive—the media must present the viewpoints of all of society’s constituent groups in a civil, balanced, and comprehensive manner. To support ethical discourse the media needs to support “groups’ internal discursive and reflective needs for self-definition, cultural development, and value clarification.” 100 Ethical discourse requires a segmented media, where each group has a segment of the media dedicated to its interests.

The emergence of an advertiser supported business model in a medium’s industry marks the beginning of the end of its ability to support discourse. 101 As advertising


99 HABERMAS, supra note 94, at 362.

100 Id.

101 The commercialization of media industries has been criticized by many scholars see e.g. BEN H. BAGDIKIAN, THE NEW MEDIA MONOPOLY (2004). There also exist a number of economic models that purport to show how the commercialization of mass media can have direct effect on the political process, see e.g. David Strömber, Mass Media Competition, Political Competition, and Public Policy, 71 THE REVIEW OF ECONOMIC STUDIES 265 (2004)
accounts for more and more of the profits of a medium’s industry, that industry will begin to adopt advertisers’ segmentation preferences in order to maximize advertising profits. The segmentation preferences of advertisers are toxic to the public sphere for two reasons: (1) the audiences favored by advertisers don’t correspond to authentic group interests and identities; and (2) there are large segments of society that are not favored by advertisers. Because advertiser segmentation “neither necessarily nor uniformly reflects or responds to individuals’ or groups’ diverse concerns or interests,” it undermines the ability of a medium to support ethical discourse—which requires discursive segmentation. Since, advertisers are not equally interested in all members of society; the media will inevitably underserve certain populations. This undermines the ability of a medium to support moral discourse—which requires inclusiveness.

In the American newspaper industry, the shift to an advertising supported business model began in the 1830’s. By 1890 slightly more than half of the newspaper industry’s income came from advertising. Today, over 80% of the newspaper industry’s income comes from advertising. As advertising has come to account for

102 C. EDWIN BAKER, MEDIA MARKETS, AND DEMOCRACY (2002) at 181

103, Id. at 178

104 Id. at 181

105 Id.


107 Id.
more and more of the newspaper industry’s revenue newspapers have become targeted at certain key demographics favored by advertisers.

The importance of advertiser segmentation preferences is evidenced by the trend toward monopoly that has accompanied the rise of the advertising supported business model. Economic models generally predict that “competition between two similar newspapers seeking to attract the same audience cannot survive in the long run.” More specifically, when newspapers compete for the same key demographics preferred by advertisers, only one will survive. The demise of competition occurs because “if one newspaper is read by a large enough portion of the readers targeted by advertisers, it may gain sufficient strength, using advertising revenue to reduce cover price or to add features, that it drive out the competition.” Advertisers chose newspapers based on circulation and the ability to reach their target markets. Most advertisers have the same target markets, thus newspapers have an incentive to appeal to as many of those markets as possible to increase circulation. This results in multiple newspapers pursuing the

108For economic models predicting the demise of competition in markets where two newspapers target the same audience see James N. Rosse, The Decline of Direct Newspaper Competition, 30 JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION 65 (1980); James N. Detouzos & William B. Trautman, Economic Effects of Media Concentration: Estimates from a Model of the Newspaper Firm, 39 THE JOURNAL OF INDUSTRIAL ECONOMICS 1 (1990); David Strömber, Mass Media Competition, Political Competition, and Public Policy, 71 THE REVIEW OF ECONOMIC STUDIES 265 (2004);

109 BAKER, supra note 78, at 22 (citing Rosse, supra not 103)

110 BAKER, supra note 78, at 26.

111 There are both theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that most newspaper’s are interested in the same target audiences, see e.g R.S. Thompson, Circulation Versus Advertiser Appeal in the Newspaper Industry, 27 THE JOURNAL OF INDUSTRIAL ECONOMICS 259 (1989) (although this study uses data from England, there are no culturally specific aspects to the Thompson’s model. Thompson concludes, “Given the high degree of product differentiation, an industry-wide result must inevitably miss some of the
same readers. Due to the presences of economics of scale and indirect network effects, competition between two similar newspapers seeking to attract the same audience cannot survive in the long run. In 1880, there were 689 cities in the US that had competition among daily newspapers—that is two or more separately owned edited, and printed papers –by 1986 that number was down to 26.\footnote{Baker, supra note 78, at 16. The rise of monopoly’s in the newspaper industry have raised antitrust concerns since the 1950’s see Keith Roberts, Antitrust Problems in the Newspaper Industry, 82 Harvard Law Review 319 (1968); Note, Local monopoly in the Daily Newspaper Industry, 61 Yale Law Journal 948 (1952)}

Both the trend toward monopoly, and the importance of catering to advertising preferences are will illustrated by the newspaper circulation war in 1981 between the \textit{Chicago Tribune} and the \textit{Chicago Sun Times} \footnote{JAMES D. SQUIRES, READ ALL ABOUT IT! 70 (1\textsuperscript{st} Paperback ed. 1994)}\footnote{Id.}. It was won by the \textit{Chicago Tribune} not by fighting a circulation war but rather by fighting an “advertising-driven content in quest of the highest-quality readers.”\footnote{Id. at 66} The \textit{Tribune} considered the Chicago population to be dividable into five groups, “the top being ‘Quintile One’ with the highest demographic profile and ‘Quintile Five’ being the lowest.”\footnote{Id.} The \textit{Tribune} was primarily interested in the top two quintiles, “since Quintiles Four and Five don’t read or have money to spend in response to advertisers, they were pretty much disregarded as helpful \textit{Tribune} subtleties of competition within subsets of titles. Furthermore, individual difference in cost structure and dependence on classified advertising may determine the profit impact of particular readership changes. Nonetheless, the results in this paper provided a confirmation of the industry’s received wisdom of a trade-off between circulation and ABC readership. \textit{Id.} 271)
targets.” 116 The editors of the Tribune discovered that in general the Tribune did well among Quintiles One and Two, and that the Tribune had an incredibly attractive audience on Sunday. 117 More specifically, “[t]he Sun-Times...sold fewer papers on Sunday...primarily to lower-income, inner-city readers.” 118 The editors of the Tribune, realizing that “[w]inning the battle for Quintile Three inner-city readers should not be nearly as important to advertisers as the incredible advantage in reader quality the tribune had on Sunday,” 119 decided to bulk up their Sunday edition. The Sun-Times responded in kind, “shifting its own resources away from its best circulation days and its best audience to its worst.” 120 The results were impressive, “[w]ithin a year, with the Tribune dramatically widening its lead in advertising share, the Field family gave up and sold its newspaper to Rupert Murdoch.” 121

Further evidence of the importance of advertiser preferences in the newspaper industry can be seen by the systematic efforts of newspaper publishers to eliminate “marginal circulation.” Since the 1970’s newspapers have become increasingly aware of

116 Id.
117 Id. at 70
118 Id. at 69
119 Id. at 70
120 Id. at 79
121 Id.
the fact that maximum circulation does not necessarily translate into maximum profits.\textsuperscript{122} Newspapers have come to realize that “the highest profitability comes from delivering advertising sold at the highest rates in a paper containing the fewest pages and sold for the highest possible retail price to the fewest high-income customers necessary to justify the highest rate to advertisers.”\textsuperscript{123} As a result “newspapers routinely control costs and enhance profits by cutting off circulation that is un-profitable because it lacks value as a quality audience.”\textsuperscript{124} Furthermore, by eliminating “low-income minority readers, newspapers actually improve the overall demographic profile” \textsuperscript{125} which allows newspaper publishers to justify raising advertising rates. Consider the comments of Cathleen Black, president and CEO of the Newspaper Association of American in 1995:

“[w]hile audited numbers continue to show circulation declines at many daily newspapers, much of it is due to internal business decision newspapers are making, adjusting to changing market fundamentals. The result is that readership is up, or still strong with key demographic groups, as newspapers respond to changing lifestyles by forging a strong product and reader fit.”\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{122}William B. Blankenburg, \textit{Newspaper Ownership and Control of Circulation to Increase Profits}, 59 JOURNALISM QUARTERLY 390, 392 (1982)

\textsuperscript{123} SQUIRES, \textit{supra} note 113, at 90

\textsuperscript{124}Id.

\textsuperscript{125} Id. at 91

\textsuperscript{126} GILBERT CRANBERG ET AL., \textit{TAKING STOCK} 93 (2001)
Newspapers eliminate marginal circulation by utilizing three main strategies: (1) they withdraw from markets which have poor demographics and/or are expensive to serve;\(^{127}\) (2) they raise their prices—effectively pricing poorer groups out\(^{128}\); (3) they change their content—making the paper less attractive to certain groups.\(^ {129}\)

Many in the newspaper industry have noted the impact of this behavior on the public sphere. For example Gregory Farve, vice president for news at McClatchy and former editor of the *Sacramento Bee* worries that, if the trend toward targeting only those segments of the readers that “our advertisers…believe to be ‘the best’ areas of our communities,”\(^ {130}\) some day “we will be without newspapers that will give voice to all segments of our communities so that we can learn from each other, so that we can listen to each other, so that we can grow together and learn from our differences.” Squires, former editor of the Tribune, notes that the practice of targeting high income audiences, “creates an underclass strata of advertisers and their customers, who are excluded from newspapers and ultimately alienated form them.”\(^ {131}\)

---

\(^{127}\) *Id.*. See also Blankenburg, *supra* note 122 (a study of 27 Garnett paper’s which showed that these papers were effectively eliminating marginal circulation);


\(^{129}\) Geneva Overholser, *Editor Inc.*, 20 AMERICAN JOURNALISM REVIEW (Dec. 98)

\(^{130}\) *Id.*

\(^{131}\) SQUIRES, *supra* note 113, at 90
CHAPTER FOUR: THE AMERICAN BLOGOSPHERE

The previous chapter established the plausibility of the theoretical framework presented in chapter two by laying out the case of the American newspaper industry. This chapter will present a second case: American blogs. This chapter, like the previous one, proceeds in two parts. The first part examines the evolution of American blogs in the context of the theory of commercialization laid out in chapter two. The second part uses network analysis to examine whether the blogosphere supports the public sphere.

Before proceeding to the first part, we need to define some terms. Blogs are websites that consist of “reverse chronological sequences of dated entries, usually with sidebars of profile information and usually maintained and published with the help of a popular blog-authoring tool.”1 Authors of blogs are referred to as bloggers. The collection of all blogs and their links constitutes the blogosphere.2 For the purposes of this study, a distinction will be made between the global blogosphere and the American blogosphere. The American blogosphere consists of all English language blogs written by ‘American’ authors and the links between them. Admittedly, this is a fuzzy definition. However, it is necessary to consider the American blogosphere separately because blogging has evolved differently in different countries. For example, the Chinese

1Ravi Kumar et. al., Structure and Evolution of Blogspace, 47 Communications of the ACM, Dec. 2004, at 36. (Kumar uses the term Blogspace instead of Blogosphere, the two terms are interchangeable. Some examples of popular blog authoring tools include: Blogger, Blogspot, Typepad, and LiveJournal)

2 Kumar, supra note 1, at 36
blogosphere emerged much later than the American blogosphere, and has evolved at a different rate and along a different path.\(^3\)

4.1 The Commercialization of the Blogosphere

Chapter two argued that media industries undergo a process of commercialization that proceeds in three phases. These phases can be demarcated by shifts in the business model utilized by a medium’s industry, as well as by shifts in the attributes of industry participants. In the first phase, a medium’s industry focuses on selling information and cultural artifacts to the public. In this phase, both content producers and consumers are innovators—as defined by Everett Rogers\(^4\). In the second phase, a medium’s industry shifts to selling the public to politicians and civil society actors, and early-adopters enter the industry. In the third phase, the business model becomes selling consumers to advertisers, and members of the early-majority come to dominate the industry.

This section looks at the history of blogs in light of the theory of commercialization presented in Chapter Two. The following history is structured by the three phases presented above. The description of each phase consists of a history of the phase highlighting key players, practices, events, a profile of bloggers, a profile of blog readers, and a discussion of the dominant business model.


4.1.1 Phase 1: 1994–July, 1999

In the first phase of commercialization the business model is based on selling information and cultural goods to consumers; and those who adopt a medium in this phase are innovators. Innovators make up the first 2.5% of a population that adopt a technology. Their primary characteristic is venturesomeness. Their interests in new ideas often lead them outside their local peer networks. They tend to have cosmopolite social networks, and are often friends or acquaintances of other innovators. As a general rule earlier adopters are better educated and have a higher social status than later adopters. They also have access to significant financial resources, that help them absorb loses from unprofitable innovations. ⁵

The first phase of commercialization in the American blog industry began in January 1994 when Justin Hall launched Justin’s Home Page. It ended in July 1999 when Pitas, the first free build-your-own-weblog tool, was launched. Between Hall’s first posting and the time that Pitas was launched, a few hundred blogs were started. Immediately after the release of Pitas, and other similar tools, the blogosphere exploded, growing, in less than a year, from a few hundred sites to thousands.

Blogs are the direct descendents of the personal web pages of the early 1990s. It is difficult to distinguish between a blog and the personal websites that spawned them⁶.

---

⁵ Id.

However, there are two key differences that many commentators employ. The first is the frequency of updates. Personal web pages are updated infrequently, perhaps once or twice a month. Blogs on the other hand, are updated quite frequently—multiple times a day in some cases. The second key difference is content format. Early blogs utilized a “short form that was easy to digest… it was a mix of personality and efficient writing that pointed to all the wonderful things found online.”

Rebecca Blood similarly observes that, “[t]he original weblogs were link-driven sites. Each was a mixture in unique proportions of links, commentary, and personal thoughts and essays.”

Personal web pages on the other hand, “had long, thoughtful essays.”

Justin Hall was among the first to utilize this new format. Hall began posting while working as an intern at Wired magazine. He returned the next summer to work with Howard Rheingold. From then on, blogging was an integral part of his life. He shared everything with his audience, “[f]or Hall, nothing seemed to be too embarrassing or too personal to write about -- with photos and links. From romantic relationships to his


7Interview by Rebecca Blood with Matt Haughey (June 2005), at http://www.rebeccablood.net/bloggerson/matthaughey.html (Rebecca Blood and Matt Haughey were both early bloggers.)


9 Blood, supra 7
father’s suicide to a bad case of shingles.” 10 While he was in college he supported his Web site through reader donations. Later his readers, through their donations, sent Hall on a trip to Japan. He was arguably one of the first bloggers to generate income through his site. He was also one of the longest-lived bloggers. In an industry where few blogs last more than a couple of years, he maintained his blog for 11 years—from January 2004 to January 2005 when, at the age of 31, he stopped blogging. 11

Between 1994 and 1997 the blogosphere grew very little. In 1997, John Barger coined the term weblog 12. Jesse Garrett, editor of Infosit, compiled the first list of weblogs. Garrett sent this list to Cameron Barrett, editor of the blog CamWorld, in November of 1998. Barrett published this list on CamWorld. Those who maintained other blog-like sites began to email Barrett their URLs for inclusion on the list. A community rapidly formed around this list. As Rebecca Blood notes, “it was easy to read all of the weblogs on Cameron’s list, and most interested people did.” 13

In 1999 the blogosphere grew rapidly. According to Rebecca Blood’s assessment: of 1999 “[m]ore and more people began publishing their own

10 Revhan Harmanci, Time to get a life—pioneer blogger Justin Hall bows out at 31, S. F. CHRON., Feb. 20, 2005, at A1

11 Id.


13 Blood, supra 8
weblogs…Suddenly it became difficult to read every weblog every day, or even to keep track of all the new ones that were appearing.”

As the number of blogs increased, the blogger community struggled to define what qualified as a blog. In an entry entitled “The Anatomy of a Weblog.” dated January 26, 1999, Cameron Barrett describes the realization that his site was in fact a weblog:

I stood back a few steps and realized that yeah, Camworld is a weblog or a microportal...It's updated regularly [daily]. It's got a nice, clean easy-to-use design and user interface. It doesn't patronize to the end user, dumbing things down too much. It has a theme [Random Thoughts + Web Design + New Media]. It has a way for the users to interact with each other [a mailing list]. It even has somewhat of a community, maintained by repeat visitors and list members who contribute many of the links often found in Camworld.

The blogging community’s struggle to define a blog was settled early in 1999 when Brigette Eaton launched the Eatonweb Portal—a directory of blogs. In compiling the Eatonweb Portal, Brigette Eaton defined a blog as simply a site that consists of dated entries. As the Eatonweb Portal came to be considered the most complete listing of weblogs available, Eaton’s inclusive definition of a blog was accepted by the blogging community. In May, Barrett wrote a second entry about weblogs, entitled “More About

14 Blood, supra 8


16 Blood, supra 8
Weblogs”. From this entry it is clear that, for Barrett, the concept of a blog was now a concrete and familiar one:

“I hope the weblog "craze" continues as more and more people discover the power of a regularly updated site that reflects their own unique personality. In a few years, it'd be neat to see the weblog format overtake the standard home page format with monster GIFs of people's cats, dogs, babies, and cars. But I doubt it will happen….”

In the second half of 1999 a number of free-blog hosting tools were released which caused the blogosphere to explode. In July 1999, Pitas the first free blog-hosting tool launched, followed within a few months by Blogger, Groksoup, Edit This Page, and Velocinews. The founders of many of these companies were among the earliest bloggers. Mallory Jensen argues that they “in an effort to make their own work easier—built tools that allow anyone no matter how little Internet savvy he or she posses, to create and maintain a blog.” By making blogging more accessible, these tools catalyzed the growth of the blogosphere: there were 50 blogs in the beginning of 1999; by the beginning of 2001, there were thousands.

Early bloggers could be considered innovators: they were venturesome, well educated, had access to significant financial resources, and were part of cosmopolite social networks. The earliest bloggers and the earliest blog readers were, not

17Cameron Barrett, More about Weblogs, CAMWORLD (May. 11, 1999), at http://www.camworld.com/archives/001180.html
18Mallory Jensen, A Brief History of Weblogs, 42 COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW 22 (Sept. 2003)
surprisingly, technology professionals and enthusiasts. Many were entrepreneurs, they were well educated, and they lived in information technology hubs such as Seattle, San Francisco, and New York. However, despite the fact that they were dispersed across the country, they formed a tight knit community. To many of these people blogging was a social outlet—a means by which to meet others with similar interests. In fact, many early bloggers claim to have met many of their friends and in some cases their spouses through blogging. Similarly, many early bloggers claim that blogging has helped them build social networks that span the globe. For example, Matt Haughey, a prominent early blogger notes “I've got a huge assortment of friends I've met online and eventually offline, living all over the world that we visit, and receive gifts from. Most everyone I knew in San Francisco was someone I met online.”

Early blogs lacked a business model. Some asked for donations, as in the case of Justin Hall and Matt Hughey. Many considered blogging a means of self-promotion; and in fact many of the earliest bloggers attribute many of the professional opportunities that came their way to their blogs. For example, Matt Haughey notes “blogging has opened many doors for me. Every job I've had since 2000 I got or was aided by my blogging activities.” Likewise Jessamyn West claims, “I've gotten jobs, traveled to other countries, given talks, written articles and edited books mainly because of the exposure

20 Barrett, surpa 15

21 Blood supra note 7

22 Id.
I've gotten because of my blog...having a blog, or a web site generally, really was a catalyst for a lot of the things that I've done professionally over the past 6-8 years."23

4.1.2 Phase 2: July, 1999- November, 2004

During the second phase of commercialization, a medium becomes political, and its primary business is selling the public to civil society actors; during this phase early adopters dominate the medium’s industry. Early adopters make up 12.5% of the population. Their primary trait is a desire for respect. They are motivated by more than economic concerns. Their aim is to serve their community and advance their group’s interests. Early adopters are localities that also enjoy central positions in their social networks. Moreover, early adopters exhibit high degrees of opinion leadership.24

It is convenient to signal the beginning of the second phase of commercialization of the American blog industry with the launch of Pitas in May 1999, and demarcate its end with the close of the American presidential election in November 2004. During this period the blogosphere experienced rapid growth and new blog forms emerged. Among them was the political blog. The political blog differed from the blogs of the early blogosphere in that they were both filters for information as well as news sources in their own right. During this period, political blogs were responsible for breaking and amplifying a number of important news stories. The actions of political bloggers are often

23 Interview by Rebecca Blood with Jessamyn West (July 2005), at http://www.rebeccablood.net/bloggerson/jessamynwest.html

24 ROGERS, supra note 4, at 283
cited as the proximate cause for many key political events during this period including
the ousting of Trent Lott, the downfall of Dan Rather, and the rise of Howard Dean to
national prominence. The presidential elections of 2004 served as a catalyst for the
commercialization of the blogosphere. Candidates, hoping to target certain niche
communities, bought significant amounts of advertising on blogs; demonstrating the
usefulness of blogs as a medium for advertising.

The introduction in late 1999 of free blog-hosting tools such as Blogger
transformed the blogosphere. These tools dramatically reduced the technical competency
required to start and maintain a blog, opening the medium up to a much larger segment of
society. One result was the emergence of a new form of blogging. Rebecca Blood
describes the transformation:

While weblogs had always included a mix of links, commentary, and personal notes, in the post-Blogger
explosion increasing numbers of weblogs eschewed this
focus on the web-at-large in favor of a sort of short-form
journal. These blogs...were instead a record of the
blogger's thoughts: something noticed on the way to work,
notes about the weekend, a quick reflection on some
subject or another. Links took the reader to the site of
another blogger with whom the first was having a public
conversation or had met the previous evening, or to the site
of a band he had seen the night before. Full-blown
conversations were carried on between three or five blogs,
each referencing the other in their agreement or rebuttal of
the other's positions. Cults of personality sprung up as new
blogs appeared, certain names appearing over and over in
daily entries or listed in the obligatory sidebar of "other
weblogs"...It was, and is, fascinating to see new bloggers
position themselves in this community, referencing and
reacting to those blogs they read most, their sidebar an affirmation of the tribe to which they wish to belong.25

In late 1999 and 2000 another blog form, the ‘political blog’, emerged. Among those who colonized the blogosphere during its growth spurt in 1999 and 2000 were librarians26, lawyers27, and a few journalists.28 These professions appreciated both the filtering function of blogs as well as their ability to foster communities around particular topics. However, the sites they produced were unlike ‘filter blogs’ and ‘diary blogs’. These sites were often political in nature and the entries on these sites often resembled op-ed pieces in both length and tone. The emergence of this blog form marked the beginning of the political blogosphere.

The terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 both catalyzed the growth of the political blogosphere and brought it to the attention of the mainstream media. The attacks as well as the national and international reaction to these events were covered in real time in the blogosphere. The mainstream media utilized the blogosphere as a resource to cover the story, thus bringing it to the attention of the general population. The resulting shift in the blogosphere was clearly and quantitatively identifiable: Kumar

25 BLOOD, supra 8

26 For a description of early librarian blogger see Marylaine Block, Communicating Off the page, Library Journal, Sep. 15, 2001 at 50. Also see Blood supra note 23

27 For accounts of successful bloggers who are lawyers see King of Bloggers, THE AMERICAN LAWYER, Sep. 2002 (an account of Glen Reynolds and his blog InstaPundit); Lev Grossman, Blogs Have Their Day, TIME, Dec. 20, 2004 at 109 (an account of the lawyers behind the blog PowerLine which was largely responsible for ‘RatherGate’).

28 Brent Cunningham, In Review: New Media’s Newest Notes, COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW, May 2001, at 10; see also Paula Porter, Weblogs Grow in Popularity, DESIGN NEWS, Oct. 20, 2003 at 27
et. al. found that “[b]logospace underwent a transition behavior around the end of 2001, and has been rapidly expanding over the past year[2002], not just in metrics of scale, but also in metrics of community structure and connectedness.”

After the 9/11 attacks people used blogs to vent their anger about the terrorist attacks and to debate responses, this created the impression that the blogosphere was primarily political. At the time these sites were labeled ‘war blogs.’ A New York Times article, written in June of 2002, notes that “[t]hanks in part to the participation of some prominent journalists and academics, the pundit-style blogs quickly reached a new level of public and media recognition that other blogs had never achieved. As a result some latecomers now think Weblogs are inherently political.”

The journalists and academics that were among the first to utilize the blogosphere had strong social and professional ties to the mainstream, which may have helped the nascent blogosphere establish credibility. Among the journalists who helped establish the legitimacy of the political blogosphere were Andrew Sullivan, a former editor of The New Republic; Virgina Postrel, a former editor of Reason; Joshua Marshall, a former writer and editor at The American Prospect; Joanne Jacobs, a former San Jose Mercury

29Ravi Kumar et. al. On the Bursty Evolution of Blogspace. PROCEEDINGS OF THE TWELFTH INTERNATIONAL WORLD WIDE WEB CONFERENCE 568 (2003) (It is interesting to note that Kumar et. al. noted in 2003 that ‘measures of connectedness must plateau within two years.’)

30 David F. Gallagher, A Rift Among Bloggers, THE NEW YORK TIMES, June 10, 2002, at C.4

31 Id.

News columnist; and Mickey Kaus, a former writer for The New Republic and Newsweek. These bloggers all attracted an impressive amount of attention both in terms of their readership and in terms of mainstream media coverage. The prototypical example of academic bloggers is Glenn Reynolds, editor of the blog Instapundit and law professor. Reynolds started Instapundit in August 2001. Initially his audience consisted of a “small but high-powered following from chat boards, e-mail exchanges, and the like.” His coverage of 9/11 brought him to the attention of the mainstream media, catapulting him to national prominence. Today he is widely considered to be one of the most influential and popular bloggers.

These early political bloggers didn’t make much money. For example, by April of 2001 Andrew Sullivan had made $9,000 in contributions; Mickey Kaus had made just over $1,000; Virgina Postrel netted $730. However, as the popularity of the blogosphere grew, so did the fundraising ability of these blogger/journalists. When Andrew Sullivan was fired from his job at the New York Times magazine in 2003 for comments he made on his blog, he was able to raise $100,000 in donations.

One might say that the blogosphere came of age in 2003 when the public, the mainstream media, and the political establishment began to embrace blogs. A Pew study

33 Id.
34 King of Bloggers, supra note 27
35 Cunningham, supra note 28
36 Id.
conducted between March and May of that year found that 2% of American adults who use the internet had a blog; and that 11% of adult American internet users read blogs.\textsuperscript{37} As the public began to embrace the blogosphere, so did the mainstream media. The trade papers of the day are filled with articles debating whether or not bloggers are journalists, and whether or not journalists should blog.\textsuperscript{38} By the end of that year, Jonathan Dube at CyberJournalist.net listed nearly 100 mainstream media blogs and another 100 independent media blogs.\textsuperscript{39} In addition to gaining acceptance among the mainstream media, the blogosphere demonstrated its political muscle. In 2003 it transformed Howard Dean from a sideshow into a national political figure.\textsuperscript{40}

As the prominence and reach of the blogosphere increased, it began to attract the attention of marketers. Corporate America first took notice of blogs not as a marketing tool but as a knowledge management system.\textsuperscript{41} As the audience of blogs increased, companies began to utilize blogs to build their brand identities. The goal of these sites was not to sell products but to connect with consumers and share information.

\textsuperscript{37}Amanda Lenhart et. al, \textit{Content Creation Online}, \textsc{Pew Internet & American Life Project}, at http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Content Creation_Report.pdf (Feb. 29. 2004)

\textsuperscript{38}See \textit{e.g.} Keven Ann Wiley, \textit{Readers Glimpse an Editorial Board’s Thinking}, \textit{57 Nieman Reports} (Fall 2003), at 88

\textsuperscript{39}Kelly Heyboer, \textit{Bloggin’ in the Newsroom}, \textsc{American Journalism Review}, Dec. 2003 at 10

\textsuperscript{40}For \textit{e.g.} Jeanne Cummings, \textit{The E-Team—Behind the Dean Surge: A Gang of Bloggers and Webmasters}, \textit{The Wall Street Journal}, Oct. 14, 2003 at A1; Edward Cone, \textit{The Marketing of the President 2004}, \textsc{Baseline}, Dec. 1, 2003, at 32

\textsuperscript{41}Danny Bradbury, \textit{From blogs to k-logs}, \textsc{Computer Weekly}, (Sep. 23,2003) at pg. 40; Rachel Osterman, \textit{More Business Turn to Online Weblogs to Keep Workers Connected}, Knight Ridder Tribune Buisness News, (Jul 23, 2003), at 1;
Companies that attempted to use blogs as marketing tools were advised to pick colorful individuals within the company as bloggers, ensure that their weblogs remained personal, and to avoid using their weblogs to sell items.42

Despite the use of blogs as marketing vehicles, in 2003 it was still unclear whether they could be used for advertising. Furthermore, no one was sure how to build a profitable business model around blogs. An article in the Economist speculated that blogs might one day come to rely on a subscription model. As an alternative, it suggested an advertising supported model similar to the one used by search engines.43 It should be noted, that some elite bloggers were able to support themselves by gathering donations online.

In late 2003, the evolution of the medium toward an advertiser centric business model was significantly advanced by the emergence of two new business models for blogs. In order to become a viable vehicle for advertising, blogs had to overcome two hurdles. The first hurdle was the fact that stand-alone blogs “tend to have a single author, a narrow focus, and a small audience.” This makes it difficult for a single blogger to attract enough advertising revenue to make a living. The logical solution to this problem was to assemble large network of bloggers who together might generate significant traffic to a particular site. Two companies emerged around this time that attempted to build such networks Weblogs Inc. and Gwaker. These companies became profitable within 18


months, and Weblogs Inc. was eventually sold to AOL for $25 million. The second problem faced by blogs was a coordination problem—advertisers did not want to deal with a large number of individual bloggers when buying ads. To solve this problem ad-brokerages, such as Blogads, appeared on the scene. These services provide as a single point of contact for advertisers, allowing firms to execute large ads buys without having to negotiate deals with dozens of individual bloggers.

The advertising outlays associated with the 2004 presidential elections showed that blogs were a viable medium for advertising, and that advertising was a viable revenue source blogs. In November of 2003 John Kerry began an advertising landside in the blogosphere when he placed an ad on the 25 political blogs that were Blogads clients at the time. As the presidential election drew to a close, the blog industry expanded its portfolio of advertisers. By the end of the presidential contest, blue chip marketers such as Audi, Nike, Dell, and Random House were buying ads on blogs.

The presidential elections also exposed the deeply partisan nature of the blogosphere. Adamic and Glance, conducted a network analysis of the blogosphere in late 2004, and found that liberals and conservatives linked primarily within their own

---

44 Melaine Wells, *Matchmakers*, FORBES, Sep. 19, 2005, at 77 (profiles two advertising executives who are attempting to start a new advertising firm that specializes in blogs).


46 *Id.*
communities.47 The study found that “this division extended into their discussion, with liberal and conservative blogs focusing on different news articles, topics, and political figures.”48

While the focus of this section has been on the most popular political blogs, which garner the majority of both media attention and blog readership, it is important to note that the non-political, non A-list blogosphere also lends support to the theory under discussion. After performing a sophisticated link analysis of the blogosphere as well as statistical analysis of bloggers, Kumar et. al. found that blogs are “interwoven into a network of tight-knit but active communities.”49 These communities tend to include from three to twenty bloggers. The composition of these online communities can largely be explained by age, physical location, and interest. More specifically, Kumar et. al found that over 70% of the friendships in the blogosphere could be explained by these three factors: “Age is the weakest explanation for friendships, while location and interest are roughly equivalent. Interest alone explains 45% of friendship, while location alone explains 55%; together these two factors explain 70% of friendships.”50 In other words, many of the bloggers and their readers were localities—their virtual lives simply mirror their real lives.


48 Id.

49 Kumar et. al, *supra* 1, at 37

50 Id. at 37
One might argue that the bloggers and blog readers of this period were early adopters. The readers of blogs in this era were relatively wealthy, politically active, and often characterized as opinion leaders. A study by Jupiter Research in 2004 showed that 61% of blog readers had annual incomes of at least $60,000—far above the national average. Their response to the Dean campaign speaks to their political involvement. The bloggers of this period were, likewise, well off, politically active, localities and opinion leaders. Most A-list political bloggers had deep ties to the mainstream media as well as the political establishment. This speaks to their centrality in social networks. While, the most notable bloggers of this period seem to fit our theory, it is worth noting that the less popular blogs also support it. The tendency of non-political bloggers to form small virtual communities that corresponded to their actually communities evidences their localism, their centrality to their community’s communications networks, as well as their tendency towards opinion leadership.

4.1.3 Phase 3: 2005

In the third phase of commercialization content producers sell the public to advertisers. The shift to the final phase of commercialization occurs when the audience for a medium grows large enough that the medium becomes attractive to advertisers. As the audience for a medium grows, it comes to include members of the early majority. The early majority is the largest of the adopter groups, accounting for 33% of a social

51 See Drezner & Farrell, supra note 32
system. The early majority is known for its deliberateness. Its members do not hold positions of leadership, nor do they hold central positions in social networks. Furthermore, they aren’t as well educated or as wealthy as the early adopters or the innovators.52

A Pew report on the state of blogging, found that by the end of 2004 27% of Internet users read blogs, and 7% of Internet users had a blog. It also found that 57% of blog creators were male; 48% were under the age of 30, 42% lived in households earning over $50,000, and 39% had college or graduate degrees. Like bloggers, blog readers were young, male and well educated. It is worth noting that when Pew first started tracking blog readership in the spring of 2003 it stood at 11%, jumping to 17% in February of 2004, and to 27% in November of 2004.

Weblog readers present a very attractive audience to advertisers; and blogs, given their ability to target very specific audiences, promise advertisers a better return on investment then traditional media. In 2005, automaker Audi advertised its A3 model by buying ads on 286 blogs. The campaign was considered both successful and effective: Audi paid $50,000 in exchange for 68 million page views.54 Notwithstanding, their advertising potential, blogs have yet to attract a significant percentage of advertising revenue. In 2005 Internet advertising accounted for $12.9 billion, or 4.6 percent of total

52 ROGERS, supra note 4 at 284


54 Clive Thompson, Blogs to Riches: The Have and Have-Not of the Blogging Boom, NEW YORK, Feb. 20, 2006
media dollars spent, while weblogs captured only a small portion of that.\textsuperscript{55} However, a survey of advertisers in 2005 showed that 64\% of national marketers were interested in advertising on blogs\textsuperscript{56}.

So far three successful advertiser centric business models have emerged in the blog industry. The first is the “accidental tourist”. Here, “a lone writer who starts a blog as a mere hobby, wakes up one day to realize his audience is now as big as that of a small city newspaper.”\textsuperscript{57} These bloggers often sign up with advertising brokers, like Blogads or Google Ads, who handle the details of selling advertising. The second blogging business model is the “record-label approach.” Here, publishers fund lots of bloggers and hope that one or two will be extremely successful. Weblogs Inc., founded by Jason Calacanis, is a classic example of this approach. Weblogs Inc. has a single incredibly successful blog, \textit{Endgadget}, and a number of much less successful blogs.\textsuperscript{58} America Online bought Weblogs Inc. for $25 million in October of 2006. The third model is the “boutique approach”. In this case a publisher backs a few carefully selected blogs aimed at “some ineffable, deluxe readership.”\textsuperscript{59} Gawker media, founded by Nick Denton in 2002, is the prototypical example of this model. Denton has launched only 14 blogs.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{55} Alec Foege, \textit{Blogging for Dollars}, MEDIaweek, Jan. 93, 2006 at 18
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Id.}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{57} Thompson, \textit{supra} note 54
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Id.}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Id.}
\end{flushright}
However, all of them are in “niches that target high spending, well-educated readers.”

Within a day of AOL’s purchase of Weblogs Inc., Gawker Media entered into a deal with Dutch publisher NVU.

The blogosphere is rapidly being co-opted by mass media. The purchase of Weblogs Inc. by AOL is just one significant example of this trend. Another is the rapid rise of Huffington Post. In May 2005, Arianna Huffington, a political columnist, started the Huffington Post—a blog where she and her celebrity friends post their thoughts about politics and culture. By the end of 2005 it was logging 18 million page views a month. Unlike earlier blogs, the Huffington Post was the product of a corporation, “carefully planned, launched, and promoted.”

At the moment, blogs are still not considered a form of journalism. However, as more and more bloggers join the ranks of the mainstream media, whether through blog networks or through contracts with major media outlets, it is likely that they will be expected to accept the various norms of professional journalists. Elizbeth Spiers, a well respected blogger, notes that “Blogging is increasingly becoming a survival of the fittest and that all boils down to who has the best content. The blogs that are going to stand out are the ones who break news and have credibility.”

---

60 Id.


62 Thompson, supra 62

63 Id.
It is difficult to determine how well the theory presented in chapter two fits this phase of the blogosphere’s development. Thus far, we’ve seen the growing importance of the owners of blog networks—men who are often described as careful, knowledgeable entrepreneurs. In terms of bloggers, the A-list bloggers of 2006 were, for the most part, A-list bloggers in 2004. Blog readers in 2005 aren’t as political, as well educated or as wealthy as they were in 2004. Yet they are still wealthier, better educated, and more political than the average American Internet user. In terms of business models the models that have emerged are, as predicted, advertiser centric. A-list bloggers, as well as some B-list bloggers, are increasingly finding they can support themselves through ad-revenue; and among B and C list bloggers, there seems to be a trend toward professionalization—blogging for monetary reward.64

64 *Id.*
5  Chapter Five: The Blogosphere and the Public Sphere

It is unclear to what extent the blogosphere still supports discourse and by extension the public sphere. The previous chapter argued that the blog industry has undergone a process of commercialization; which culminated with the blog industry’s adoption of a business model of selling the public to advertisers. The theory presented in chapter two argues that this business model drastically reduces the ability of the blogosphere to support discourse. However, descriptions of the blogosphere often note that it is an intensely political place filled with vibrant debate. For example Cameron Marlow writes that:

Weblogs are a massively decentralized conversation where millions of authors write for their own audience; the conversation arises as webloggers read each other and are influenced by each others’ thoughts. It is through the constant process of reading, writing and referencing that authors come to know each other at an informal level.¹

The broad goal of this chapter is determine the extent to which the blogosphere currently supports discourse. Towards that end this chapter attempts to answer two questions: (1) Is discourse the rule or the exception in the blogosphere? (2) Is the discourse that is found in the blogosphere ethical or moral in nature?

¹ Cameron Marlow, Audience structure and authority in the Weblog Community, Proceedings of the 37th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences 3 (2004)
This thesis is concerned with the ability of the blogosphere to support discourse—communication oriented toward ascertaining the validity of a claim.² There are three forms of discourse, ethical, moral and pragmatic. Pragmatic discourse deals with the “means for realizing goals and preferences that are already given.”³ Moral discourse deals with questions of justice. These questions are not specific to a single group, rather they relate to society as a whole. In moral discourse the “outcome turns on arguments showing that the interests embodied in contested norms are unreservedly universalizable.”⁴ Ethical discourses are aimed at achieving self-understanding. In such discourses, “the participants want to get a clear understanding of themselves as members of a specific nation, as members of a local community, as inhabitants of a region and so on.”⁵

One observable manifestation of discourse is conversation, a reciprocal exchange of ideas between two people. With the aim of understanding whether the blogosphere supports discourse, this chapter studies the prevalence and nature of conversation within the blogosphere. More specifically, this thesis examines the structure of the blogosphere to determine whether bloggers are participating in conversations with each other.


⁴Id. at 162.

⁵Id. at 282.
5.1 Literature Review

To analyze the structure of the blogosphere this study utilizes social network analysis as its research methodology. Social network analysis is a research methodology, grounded in graph and systems theory that attempts to explain social phenomenon through a structural study of human interaction. The term social network refers to a set of actors and the ties among them. In social network analysis actors are interdependent and the linkages between them are channels for the flow of resources. In our case we are utilizing social network analysis to explore the blogosphere, the collection of all blogs and the links between them. In this case the links between blogs represent the transfer of thoughts between bloggers.

This thesis treats the blogosphere as a directed graph. The nodes of the graph are blogs. The edges are the links from one blog to another. Because the graph is directed, each link has a direction—a link from blog A to blog B is not considered the same as a link from blog B to blog A. Links that occur when a blog references other blogs are referred to as outbound links; and links that occur when a blog is referenced are described as inbound links.

There are actually several different types of links within the blogosphere and each type conveys a different type of social information. According to Marlow there are four

\[\text{Supra note 6}\]

\[\text{WASSERMAN AND FAUST, supra note 6}\]
mechanisms through which bloggers can forge social ties with other bloggers: blogroll
links, permalinks, comments, and trackback links. 8 Nearly every blog contains a blogroll,
a list of other blogs that the blogger reads regularly. When a blogger adds another blog to
his blogroll, it is a “type of social acknowledgement”9 and a “navigational tool for
readers to find other authors with similar interest.”10 Permalinks are links to specific
entries within a blog. Bloggers utilize permalinks to help contextualize their post,11 as
Marlow notes a permalink “signifies that some amount of thought has passed from one
individual to another.”12 Comments are arguably the most basic and common form of
social interaction in the blogosphere. Most blogging software has some type of comment
system, which allows readers to respond to a particular entry as well as to each other.
Finally, a trackback link is a mechanism through which a blogger, when writing a new
post, can notify any bloggers to whom he is responding of his post. Typically, bloggers
will display all trackbacks to a particular entry below that entry. This allows readers to
easily find other blog posts on the same subject. In theory, trackback links allow readers
to easily follow conversations spanning several blogs.13

8Marlow, supra note 1,

9Id. at 3

10Id.

11Lada Adamic & Natalie Glance, The Political Blogosphere and the 2004 U.S. Election: Divided They
Blog (2005), WWW 2005 2ND ANNUAL WORKSHOP ON THE WEBLOGGING ECOSYSTEM: AGGREGATION,

12Marlow, supra note 1, at 3

The earliest studies of the blogosphere that used social network analysis focused on the distribution of inbound links within the blogosphere. Clay Shirkey, lumping together both permalinks and blogroll links, found that a relatively small number of blogs are heavily referenced while the majority of blogs are seldom referenced—in other words, the distribution of inbound links fit the power law distribution. Based on this result, Shirkey argued that the blogosphere could be divided into three sectors: A-list blogs, classical blogs, and conversational blogs. According to this classification, A-list blogs behave like broadcast outlets, “distributing material without participating in conversation about it.” Classical blogs are “blogs published by one or a few people, for a moderately-sized audience, with whom the authors have a relatively engaged relationship.” Conversational blogs are blogs written by individuals and intended for their friends and associates; these blogs tend to have small but highly engaged audiences.

Cameron Marlow extended Shirkey’s work by separately analyzing the distributions of inbound permalinks and inbound blogroll links. His findings confirmed

15Id.
16Id.
17Id.
18Id.
19Marlow, supra note 8
Shirkey’s: both distributions fit the power law. However, Marlow also found that the popularity of a website differed significantly depending on whether one uses the number of inbound blogroll links or the number of inbound permalinks as the metric. In other words, there is little correlation between a blog’s ranking based on inbound permalinks and that blog’s ranking based on inbound blogroll links. In particular he found that “[m]any of the earlier ‘A-List’ weblogs…do not place in the top 20 for permalinks, suggesting that while their names are recognized and placed on many blogrolls, their content is not as widely influential as those with high permalink rank.”

It is worth noting that while this result raises questions about the proper metrics to use to classify blogs as A-list, conversational, or classical, it does not reduce the analytic value of the distinguishing between the three groups.

Given their impact on the political process as well as their popularity, A-List blogs dealing with politics have received the lion share of the analytic attention. Drezner and Farrell were the first to apply link analysis techniques to the political blogosphere. Using a methodology similar to Shirkey’s, they found that the distribution of incoming links among political blogs fits a lognormal distribution. This differs slightly from other studies, which showed that the distribution of inbound links within the general blogosphere fit a power law. It also differs slightly from studies of political content on the web in general. For example, Hindman et. al found that inbound link distribution

20Marlow, supra note 8, at 6

among political websites fits a power law distribution. Based on their finding, Drezner and Farrell predict that “[w]hile blogs rich in links are indeed likely to get richer…some link-poor blogs too may become ‘rich’ over time.” The authors then examine the relationship between the media and the blogosphere, arguing that “[t]he networked structure of the blogosphere allows interesting arguments to make their way to the top of the blogosphere;” and “[b]ecause of the lognormal distribution of weblogs, the media only needs to look at the top blogs to obtain a ‘summary statistic’ about the distribution of opinion on a given political issue.” Finally, they argue that political blogs have a strong effect on the mainstream media for three reasons: (1) first, strong pre-existing social and professional ties between early [political] bloggers and journalists helped journalists to embrace the new medium; (2) second, bloggers greatly simplify the work of journalists by acting as experts on particular topics; (3) and third, since bloggers are able to respond to events before the mainstream media, they frame the events—establishing the boundaries of subsequent coverage.

Adamic and Glance analyzed the structure of the political A-list blogosphere with the goal of understanding how liberal and conservative bloggers interacted with each other and found that they seldom did. In particular they were interested in determining


23 Drezner & Farrell, supra note 21, at 12.

24 Id. at 13

25 Id.
whether the blogosphere was undergoing a process of balkanization.\textsuperscript{26} Towards this end, they analyzed the linking patterns and discussion topics of political bloggers. More specifically, they analyzed the posts of 40 A-list political bloggers for the two months proceeding the American presidential election, “to study how often they referred to one another and what overlap was in the things they discussed, both within the liberal and conservative communities, and also across communities.”\textsuperscript{27} They also analyzed blogroll links among more than a thousand political blogs. They found that “liberal and conservative blogs did indeed have different lists of favorite news sources, people and topics to discuss;” and that the great majority of links remained internal to either liberal or conservative communities.

Beyond political ideology, there are a number of different dimensions along which bloggers organize themselves into communities. Kumar et. al devised an algorithm for using outbound permalinks to identify communities within the non A-list blogosphere.\textsuperscript{28} Using this algorithm the authors found evidence of the emergence of micro-communities starting in 2001. They further found that these communities were characterized by periodic bursts of activity during which intense conversations took place. In addition, they discovered a strongly connected component within the blogosphere that began a period of rapid growth in 2001. To assess whether this behavior

\textsuperscript{26} Several theorists have expressed this concern \textit{e.g.} see \textit{Cass Sunstein, Republic.com} (2002)

\textsuperscript{27}Adamic & Glance, \textit{supra} 11, at 3

resulted from the sociology of blogspace, they compared their data against a theoretical model of blogspace—randomized blogspace. They found that in randomized blogspace, the strongly connected component evolves much more quickly than in reality and that unlike reality there is no strong community structure. This led them to conclude that the structure of blogspace results from its sociology. In a subsequent study, Kumar et. al. confirmed their earlier finding that bloggers tend to organize themselves into small communities of 3 to 20 bloggers.\footnote{Ravi Kumar et. al., \textit{Structure and Evolution of Blogspace}, 47 Communications of the ACM, Dec. 2004, at 36.} They also found that these micro-communities had geographic and demographic bases—the majority of friendships, represented by reciprocal blog roll links, were among people of similar ages, who lived near each other and were interested in the same things.

The presence of micro-communities within the conversational blogosphere was also detected by Herring et. al using a similar methodology.\footnote{Susan C. Herring et. al. \textit{Conversations in the Blogosphere: An Analysis \textit{``From the Bottom of''}. PROCEEDINGS OF THE TWELFTH INTERNATIONAL WORLD WIDE WEB CONFERENCE (2004) available at http://www.blogninja.com/hicss05.blogconv.pdf} They began with four randomly selected non A-list blogs and utilized a snowball sampling technique to follow blogroll links out to three ‘hops’—they collected the four original URLs, the URLs of all the blogs to which they linked, and the URLs of all the blogs to which the latter linked. They then analyzed this data quantitatively, visually, and qualitatively. They found that “direct manifestations of online conversation
are found in both A-list and non A-list blogs, but [it] var[ies] in extent and nature according to blog topic and gender of the writer;”\textsuperscript{31} and “that blog conversations, while occasionally intense, are the exception rather than the rule.”\textsuperscript{32}

5.2 Methodology

This thesis, like much of the previous work in this area, is concerned with the implications of the blogosphere for democracy. More specifically, it is interested in determining whether the blogosphere supports the public sphere by facilitating democratic discourse. The thesis argues that the economics of the blogosphere and the characteristics of bloggers may now be such that discourse is the exception in the blogosphere. To test this argument, this thesis examines the structure of the blogosphere for evidence of discourse in the form of conversation. It finds that conversation, as measured by reciprocity of permalinks, is the exception. It also finds that much of the conversation that does exist in the blogosphere is between members of the same group. This section explains the approach this thesis takes in examining the blogosphere. It proceeds in two parts: the first part describes the data utilized and the process through which it was collected, and the second part describes how the data was analyzed.

\textsuperscript{31}Id. at 2

\textsuperscript{32}Id.
5.2.1 Data Collection Methodology

This study collects a series of snapshots of the blogosphere; where each snapshot represents the blogosphere’s response, modeled as a directed network, to an op-ed piece published in the Washington Post. In particular this study collected 78 such snapshots, corresponding to 78 op-ed pieces published on the Washington Post web site during the last week of March 2006 and the first week of April 2006.\textsuperscript{33} These snapshots were collected using a ‘snowball’ sampling approach, in which each sample was ‘grown’ from a single seed—the uniform resource locator (URL) of an op-ed piece. From this seed, the network was grown in an iterative manner that utilized data collected by the weblog tracking service Technorati to discover and follow inbound-permalinks.

This study, like many network analysis of the blogosphere and the World Wide Web, utilizes a snowball sampling approach.\textsuperscript{34} A classical snowball sampling approach begins with a specific set of actors, the seed set. Members of the seed set are asked to identify those with whom they have a specific type of relationship. These actors are referred to as the first-order zone. Any members of the first-order zone who are not members of the seed set are in turn surveyed in the same manner as the seed set. Any additional actors discovered during this survey constitute the second-order zone. This process iterates over several zones until some termination criteria is met. The approach

\textsuperscript{33}For a listing of the op-ed pieces used see infra Appendix 1.

\textsuperscript{34}A number of studies utilizes snowball sampling methods similar to the one utilized by this study see e.g. Kumar et. al, supra note 28; Adamic & Glance, surpa note 11; Hindman et. al, supra note 22
utilized here, while differing significantly from the classical snowball sampling approach, is still a snowball sampling approach. It begins with a particular seed and iteratively discovers additional actors, it terminates when no additional actors are discovered.

In this study, 78 snowball network samples were collected. For each sample an URL of an op-ed piece published on the Washington Post website between March 27, 2006 and April 3, 2006 was used as a seed. The weblog service Technorati was then queried to determine which blogs, in its database, had linked to that URL. From this list, all blogs for which Technorati had both the URL of the blog as well as the URL of the specific blog entry that referenced the seed URL were selected as the first order zone. These URLs were in turn submitted to Technorati to discover links between members of the first order zone, as well as to discover the second order zone. This process was repeated until no new blog entries were discovered. Since the data that was collected consisted of blog entries and links between blog entries, it was necessary to transform this data so that it represented blogs and the links between them. This transformation was accomplished by simply treating each link between two entries as a link between their blogs. The end result of this process is a valued, directed graph in which the nodes are blogs and the edges linking them represent citations, in the form of in-post permalinks.

Op-Ed pieces were selected as seeds in order to increase the likelihood of finding evidence of political discourse in the blogosphere. In a classical snowball sampling approach the seed set consists of a core set of actors within the population of interest.

However, here the seed is not a member of the population under consideration, political blogs. The goal of this study and previous research help justify this deviation from accepted practice. The goal isn’t to examine the structure of the blogosphere; rather it is to find evidence of conversation within the blogosphere. Previous research indicates that conversations within the blogosphere are often triggered by the mainstream media’s coverage of a particular event. This research is supported by the common practice of bloggers to cite—via a hyperlink in the body of a post—the mainstream media artifact that triggered that post. Thus, the selection of mainstream media artifacts as seeds, when looking for conversation, is logical. The selection of op-ed pieces in particular, is a reflection of the particular goal of this study: to find evidence of political discourse. Since Op-Ed pieces are written with the express intention of contributing to public political discourse around a particular topic, the hope is that the responses of bloggers to these pieces will themselves meet the definition of discourse.

This study’s focus on permalinks can also be justified by the intent of the study. As Marlow notes, a permalink signifies “that some amount of thought has passed from one individual to another.” Since, we are looking for the presence of conversation—the exchange of thoughts—it seems logical to focus on permalinks.

Many studies of the blogosphere utilize ‘spiders’, computer programs that iteratively follow outbound links; this study takes the opposite approach—it iteratively

36Kumar et al., supra note 28; see also Drezner & Farrell, supra note 21

37Marlow, supra note 1
follows inbound links. There are a number of reasons why this study utilizes this slightly unorthodox approach. First, it is impossible to follow outbound links from our seed set since our seeds, op-ed pieces, don’t contain any outbound links. Secondly, by focusing on inbound links we are able to focus on the response of bloggers to a particular issue—the issue tackled by the seed op-ed piece. This should help limit our samples to blog entries that are actually discussing the issue in question. Another advantage to focusing on inbound permalinks is that we avoid the twin problems of comment and trackback spam. Often, spammers will pepper the comments and trackbacks on a particular site with links to their sites in the hopes of increasing their relevance in search results. When following outbound links form a particular page, there is the risk of following these ‘junk’ links. By focusing on inbound permalinks, this problem is avoided—if a particular blog entry is being referenced there is a high chance that it a ‘real’ blog. It is worth noting that there was no evidence of spam blogs in the data that was collected.

The key difficulty in following inbound permalinks is that it can only be done if one has access to a catalogue of the blogosphere that keeps track of all the permalinks found in every blog entry. This study utilizes the blog tracking service Technorati as this catalogue. Technorati utilizes a number of methods to catalogue the blogosphere. The end result of this process is a database that records, among other things, which blogs link to which other blogs. There are a number of services that maintain databases similar to

Technorati’s. Of these many services Technorati was chosen for use in this study for two reasons. First Technorati claims to have one of the largest datasets of any of the blog services. It currently tracks over 35.3 million blogs and catalogs 1.2 million new blog posts each day\textsuperscript{39}. Secondly, Technorati provides users with a way to automatically query its database.\textsuperscript{40} This is essential to automating the sampling process described above.

Due to various technical limitations, neither Technorati nor any other weblog tracking service provides a perfect view of the blogosphere. They are limited in the number of blogs they know about and the speed of which they become aware of updates. Also, the completeness of their data regarding any particular blog is a function of the technologies that blog utilizes, as well as the sophistication of the algorithms they use to analyze blog postings. Thus, these services should not be considered a complete picture of the blogosphere as a whole. Rather, they are “snapshots, of specific, sometimes self-selected, slices of the blog universe.”\textsuperscript{41}

\subsection*{5.2.2 Analytic Methodology}

The data was analyzed in two ways. First, each ‘snapshot’ was examined for the presence of permalink reciprocity. This analysis was used to draw conclusions about the tendency of the blogosphere toward political discourse. Secondly, in those cases where


\textsuperscript{40}Technorati API, \textit{at} http://www.technorati.com/developers/api/ (last visited June 1, 2006). This thesis utilized Cosmos Queries, see Cosmos Query, \textit{at} http://www.technorati.com/developers/api/cosmos.html (last visited June 1, 2006).

\textsuperscript{41}Herring et. al, \textit{supra} note 30, at 3
evidence of link reciprocity was found, the data was more closely examined to see whether the links were between members of a particular ideological group (conservative or liberal) or between members of different ideological groups. This analysis helps us draw conclusions about the nature of the discourse that may be present in the blogosphere.

The notion of link reciprocity is central to the analysis presented here. This thesis defines link reciprocity as, “the non-random presence of two mutual links between pairs of vertices.”\(^{42}\) This definition, by virtue of its inclusion of the concept of randomness, is a statistical proposition and must be approached from a probabilistic viewpoint. This means that the measures of reciprocity used must take into account the possibility that a given network will show some reciprocity as a result of random processes. The measures used should also allow us to compare different networks to each other. There are a number of different indices of link reciprocity that satisfy these requirements, of these indices proposed by Garlaschelli & Loffredo\(^{43}\) and Katz & Powell\(^{44}\) were selected for use here.

Other studies have evaluated reciprocity within the blogosphere. Herring et. al were interested in answering the question, “Would the blogosphere appear to be a ‘completely connected conversation’ from the perspective of a random, ordinary

\(^{42}\)Diego Garlaschelli & Maria I. Loffredo, Patterns of link reciprocity in directed networks, 93 PHYSICAL REVIEW LETTERS 268701 (2004)

\(^{43}\)Gralaschell & Loffredo, supra note 42.

\(^{44}\)L. Katz & J.H. Powell, Measurement of the tendency toward reciprocation of choice, 18 SOCIOMETRY 659 (1955) (described by Wasserman & Faust, supra note 6, at 515)
Towards this end, they conducted a dyad census—a count of the number of symmetrical and asymmetrical links—of blog roll links. They found that “non A-list blogs link preferentially to A-list blogs, but do not experience high rates of reciprocation. A-list blogs tend to be found in reciprocal relations with other A-list blogs.”

A dyad census, the technique used by Herring et. al, is the simplest way to measure reciprocity. In formal terms a dyad is an unordered pair of vertices and the edges that connect them. There are three states for dyads: symmetrical, asymmetrical, and null. In a symmetrical dyad a mutual relationship, exists between node $i$ and node $j$, this means there exists an edge from $i$ to $j$ and an edge exists from $j$ to $i$. In an asymmetric dyad a relationship exists between $i$ and $j$. Meaning, that there is either and edge from $i$ to $j$ or and edge from $j$ to $i$. In a null dyad there is no relationship between $i$ and $j$. A dyad census is simply a count of how many of each type of dyad exists within a given graph. More formally, given a binary matrix, $X$, which represents a digraph, $G$, with $N$ nodes and $L$ edges then the frequency of symmetric dyads, $L^{\leftrightarrow}$ is defined 

$$L^{\leftrightarrow} = \sum_{i<j} X_{ij} X_{ji};$$

the frequency of asymmetric dyads, $L^{\rightarrow}$, is defined $L^{\rightarrow} = L - 2L^{\leftrightarrow}$; and the frequency of null dyads, $\emptyset$ is defined $\emptyset = \left( \frac{N}{2} \right) - L^{\rightarrow} - L^{\leftrightarrow}$. A dyad census, while simple, is of limited analytical use.

---

45 Herring, supra note 30, at 1

46 Herring, supra note 30, at 6

47 Dyads and Dyad censuses are described by Wasserman & Faust, supra note 6, at Ch. 13
In order to use a dyad census to test a hypothesis we have to take a probabilistic viewpoint. We are attempting to evaluate not only the presence of reciprocity within a network, but also whether the amount of reciprocity found in a network is more or less than one would expect based on chance alone. If the amount of reciprocity differs from what one would expect based on chance alone, then it is possible to draw the conclusion that the amount of reciprocity found in the blogosphere is the result of the sociology of the blogosphere.

Previous studies have used similar logic in their examination of the blogosphere. For example, Kumar et. al in analyzing the evolution of the blogosphere introduced the concept of randomized blogspace to help determine whether the structure of the blogosphere was a result of the sociology of blogosphere or the result of natural processes. They constructed a time graph representation of the blogosphere, in which each node was a blog, each edge a permalinks, and each edge is labeled with the date it was created. Next, they constructed a randomized version of this graph, a graph that

“is identical to the blog time graph, except that the destination of every edge is replaced by a uniformly chosen random node. Thus the arrival time of each edge, the number of edges at each time, and the exact profile of when a page chooses to add a link is left untouched. The only difference is the destination of each new link”

Kumar et al., supra note 28, at 574

Id. at 574
They found that, “randomized Blogspace actually attains a large strongly connected component faster than blog space does; however, it does not attain significant community structure.” In other words, “[i]f bloggers added links to other blogs without reference to topicality, the graph would still become well-connected, but it would not exhibit the striking community focus that characterizes Blogspace.”50 This led them to conclude that the structure of the blogosphere is a result of its sociology.

There are number of indices of reciprocity that take chance into account, this study utilizes two of them. Katz and Powell proposed the first index, $\rho_{KP}$, in 1955:

$$\rho_{KP} = \frac{2(N-1)^2 M - L^2 + L_2}{L(N-1)^2 - L^2 + L_2}$$

Here $L_2$ is the sum of out degree of each node squared, $L_2 = \sum x_{ii}^2$. This index is dimensionless and easy to interpret. If it equals 1, the tendency toward reciprocation is maximal. On the other hand, if it is less 0, then there is a tendency toward asymmetries and nulls. Finally, if it is zero then there is no tendency to reciprocate.

Garalschelli and Loffredo proposed the second index, $\rho_{GL}$, in 2005:

$$\rho_{GL} = \frac{L^{**}/L - \bar{a}}{1 - \bar{a}}$$

Here $\bar{a}$ is the ratio of observed to possible directed links, $\bar{a} = L/N(N-1)$. Like the measure proposed by Katz and Powell, this index is dimensionless and easy to interpret: a reciprocal network has a $\rho_{GL} > 0$, and an anti-reciprocal network has a $\rho_{GL} < 0$.

50 Id. at 575
Once the tendency of each sample network towards reciprocity was determined, those with positive reciprocity indexes were analyzed further to determine whether the conversation that was present was between members of the same ideological group or between members of different ideological groups. This analysis proceeded in two steps. First, each of the blogs in the samples with positive reciprocity indexes was categorized as either liberal or conservative. Next each edge in the sample was labeled as either inter group or intra group and the number of inter group and intra group edges were counted.

This methodology is very similar to the methodology used by Adamic and Glance\textsuperscript{51}. They preformed a link analysis of the blogosphere with the intent of determining whether the blogosphere was balkanized with separate liberal and conservative components. Towards this end, they gathered a single day’s snapshot of a thousand political blogs. They began with a seed set of blogs, which they compiled by aggregating URLs from several blog catalogs. They accepted the catalog’s categorizations of the blogs as either liberal or conservative. They then examined each of these blogs and, without making a distinction between blogroll links and permalinks, they built a list of all blogs cited by their seed set. They then manually categorized, using posts and blogrolls, those blogs that were cited by members of their seed set 17 or more times. They found that 91% of the links originating within either the conservative or liberal communities stay within that community.

\textsuperscript{51}Adamic & Glance, \textit{supra} note 11
Here we use a number of methods, similar to those used by Adamic and Glance, to characterize the blogs in our sample networks. The preferred method is self-reporting. In many cases blogs indicate their orientation in their names, subtitles, or on an “about” pages. If a blog does not indicate its orientation, then various weblog directories such as eTalkingHead, Technorati, BlogCatalog, CampaingLine, and Blogarama are consulted. These catalogs use a combination of automated techniques and user feedback to categorize blogs and, while they may not be 100% accurate, a casual review of their categorizations indicates that they are often on the mark. If a blog could not be categorized using one of these two methods then the content on the blogs front page was examined. If the content made clear the affiliation of the blogger in some way then it was marked accordingly. It is important to note that classifications were not made based on the positions taken by the bloggers on political issues. Rather, the content was reviewed for indications of affiliation: phrases like “us liberals.” If the blogs orientation could not be determined using these methods, then it was marked as unknown.

5.3 Results

The first stage of our analysis, an examination of the blogosphere for evidence of conversation as evidenced by reciprocity, showed that the conversation is the exception rather than the norm. Seventy-eight ‘snapshots’ were examined, corresponding to the blogosphere’s reaction to 78 Washington Post editorials. Of the 78 samples, 45 had no links between blogs. As a result their reciprocity indices were undefined. Of the remaining 33 samples, all but 4 of them had either negative or zero values for both
reciprocity indices. Thus, conversation in the blogosphere is more the exception than the norm.

The dearth of conversation in the blogosphere, with regard to op-ed pieces, is consistent with the theory presented in chapter two. The theory predicts that in the third stage of commercialization a medium losses its ability to support discourse. Thus, this result may simply indicate that the process of commercialization has already stripped the blogosphere of its ability to support wide spread political discourse.

This result is also consistent with previous research. Previous research has indicated that certain bloggers operate as broadcast outlets. In these cases the blogger will often offer his readers a link with very little in the way commentary. In such situations there is no impetus for further conversation. The blogger has posted no thoughts of his own, thus there is no reason for other blogs to respond to him.

The implications for democracy of this behavior are unclear. On the one hand, the filtering function of blogs is useful to readers. It allows readers to find useful and interesting information by simply following the links posted by their favorite bloggers. Arguably, the result is a better-informed public. On the other hand, the filtering function of blogs threatens to balkanize society by creating communities that are closed to alternate viewpoints.
Table 1 Samples with defined reciprocity indices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seed Title</th>
<th>$\rho_{\text{gl}}$</th>
<th>$\rho_{\text{kp}}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xenophobia's Threat to Prosperity</td>
<td>0.2000</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Pandemic of Fear</td>
<td>0.1111</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How We've Improved Intelligence</td>
<td>0.0714</td>
<td>0.0417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harbinger In Ohio?</td>
<td>0.0500</td>
<td>0.0286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of the House, Not Out of Trouble</td>
<td>0.0345</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Stop a Civil War</td>
<td>0.0264</td>
<td>0.0170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Breakdown</td>
<td>0.0244</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Twilight Of Objectivity</td>
<td>0.0244</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Immigration Impasse: A Way Out</td>
<td>0.0244</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia's Gas Crunch</td>
<td>0.0244</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run-Down Republicans</td>
<td>0.0233</td>
<td>0.0168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Iraq Is Still Worth the Effort</td>
<td>0.0227</td>
<td>0.0125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of Course It's a Civil War</td>
<td>0.0227</td>
<td>0.0125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Meltdown We Can't Even Enjoy</td>
<td>0.0227</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Maverick No More?</td>
<td>0.0182</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After DeLay, a New Approach?</td>
<td>0.0162</td>
<td>0.0112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 'Straight Talk' Test For 2006</td>
<td>0.0154</td>
<td>0.0083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Guest Workers' Won't Work</td>
<td>0.0141</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Party Waiting to Pounce</td>
<td>0.0127</td>
<td>0.0060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America, the Global Target</td>
<td>0.0112</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalinism Forever</td>
<td>0.0099</td>
<td>0.0046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Florida, 'Uniform' Foolishness</td>
<td>0.0092</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats' Narrow Vision</td>
<td>0.0088</td>
<td>0.0062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Don't Need 'Guest Workers'</td>
<td>0.0084</td>
<td>0.0045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>2008-2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The French in Denial</td>
<td>0.0042</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Dangerous Deal With India</td>
<td>0.0037</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What's Happening to Boys?</td>
<td>0.0029</td>
<td>0.0018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Become an American</td>
<td>0.0011</td>
<td>0.0008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let Cooler Heads Prevail</td>
<td>0.0006</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fukuyama's Fantasy</td>
<td>0.0397</td>
<td>0.0865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage in Coverage</td>
<td>0.1210</td>
<td>0.2723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guard the Borders -- And Face Facts, Too</td>
<td>0.1717</td>
<td>0.3528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Be A Billionaire?</td>
<td>0.4750</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>0.0465</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second stage of our analysis showed that bloggers tend to link to other bloggers of a similar political orientation. In this stage we examined the four samples that had positive values greater than zero for both reciprocity indices to determine the extent to which conversations were between members of different ideological groups. Using various methods, the political orientations of blogs in these four snapshots were identified. Unfortunately, it was impossible—given our methods—to determine the orientation of a large number of these blogs. This makes the data from this stage a little difficult to interpret. However, it is still possible to draw some tentative conclusions. In each of the four snapshots that we examined both liberal and conservative bloggers were represented. Conservative bloggers are better represented than liberal bloggers. Links between conservative bloggers were more prevalent than links between any other types of bloggers. Intra-group links were more prevalent than inter-group links. However, inter-group links were present in three of the four samples.

It is unclear the extent to which this result conforms to the theory presented in chapter two. The theory predicts that in the third phase of commercialization there will be a trend toward homogeneity, that more and more blogs may become neutral in an attempt to increase their readership. As a result of this trend, we would expect to see less partisanship and less intra-group discourse. To a certain extent the results of this study offer evidence both in support of the theory presented in chapter two, and against it. On the one hand, the data—contradicting theory—shows that there is a significant amount of partisanship and intra-group discourse in the blogosphere. On the other hand, the fact that the political orientation of a large number of blogs was unclear may provide some
support for the theory. Our difficulty in determining the political orientation of a large number of blogs could mean several things. One possibility is that the methods used to identify the political orientation of bloggers were wanting. Another possibility is that the bloggers are—consistent with our theory—attempting to appeal to a broad audience and thus moving away from partisan content. Yet another possibility is the blogosphere hasn’t completed the process of commercialization: it may still be in the process of transitioning from phase two (the political phase) to phase three (the commercial phase). The American newspaper industry took many decades to become fully commercialized; for decades after the rise of the penny press, the partisan press continued to exist and thrive. Likewise, even though we have seen clear signs of the commercialization of the blogosphere it may yet take some time for partisan content to be driven to marginality.

These results are consistent with previous research. A number of studies have found that linking patterns within the blogosphere are primarily between members of particular communities. More specifically, several studies have shown that political blogs tend to link to other political blogs of a similar ideology.

The implications of this behavior for democracy are unclear. On the one hand, the blogosphere maybe serving as a platform for inter group discourse; which is vital to the proper function of democracy. On the other hand, the blogosphere maybe reinforcing a culture of partisanship—making it difficult for the various political sides to reach reasoned outcomes that are in the best interest of all.
Table 2 For the four ‘snap shots’ that had positive, non-zero values for both reciprocity indices, this table shows the number of blogs of each orientation in that snapshot.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seed Title</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fukuyama's Fantasy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage in Coverage</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guard the Borders</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Be A Billionaire?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 This table lists the number of links that were found in our sample from a blog of the orientation listed in the "From" column to a blog of the orientation listed in the "To" column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seed Title</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why Be A Billionaire?</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guard the Borders</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fukuyama's Fantasy</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage in Coverage</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Some believe that the Internet has the potential to make real the promise of
democracy—a government of and for the people; others fear that the Internet will
fundamentally undermine democracy by Balkanizing society. Those who believe in the
democratizing nature of the Internet argue that the Internet is a powerful medium for
disseminating information, which allows individuals to share their ideas as well as
respond to the opinions of others. In short, the supporters of the Internet argue that it has
the potential to be a forum for vibrant political discourse. The detractors of the Internet
argue that the Internet is dividing society along ideological faults.

The goal of this thesis was to theoretically and empirically contribute to this
debate. More specifically, this thesis attempted to understand whether the blogosphere—
widely lauded as the most democratic corner of the Internet—supports political discourse.
Towards that end, the work of Jurgen Habermas, James Curran, C. Edwin Baker, Evertt
Rogers and others were synthesized to develop a theory that both defined the
requirements that democracy imposes upon media and described how over time, due to
commercialization, new mediums lose the ability to satisfy these requirements. Then, in
an attempt to show the plausibility of the theory, the case of the American newspaper
industry was presented. Finally, the theory was evaluated in light of the history and
current state of the blogosphere.

This chapter serves as the conclusion to this thesis. It is divided into four
sections. The first section summarizes the theory that was developed and tested here.
The second section summarizes the case of the American newspaper industry, as well as
points out areas for further research. Likewise, the third and fourth sections summarize the case of the American blogosphere and suggest areas for additional research.

6.1 Theory

The theoretical starting point of this thesis is Jurgen Habermas’ notion of the political public sphere. The public sphere is the social network that emerges when a public engages in discourse. The role of the public sphere in the political process is to move issues that are raised by civil society into the center of political system. More specifically, the public sphere detects and identifies problems—it convincingly and influentially thematizes them, furnishes them with possible solutions, and dramatizes them in such a way that they are taken up and dealt with by the government.1

The public sphere is built upon discourse. Discourse is communication oriented toward ascertaining the validity of a claim.2 For a specific communicative act to be considered an instance of discourse three things should be more or less true: (1) all participants must be equal i.e. they “must have equal opportunities to raise topics, arguments, and criticisms”;3 (2) the situation should be free of all forms of coercion i.e. “the situation must exclude all force ‘except the force of the better argument’”; and (3)


4 Id.
the situation must “exclude all motives except the search for the truth”\(^5\). There are three forms of discourse: ethical, moral and pragmatic.

Pragmatic discourse deals with the “means for realizing goals and preferences that are already given.”\(^6\) In pragmatic discourse “the outcome turns on arguments that relate empirical knowledge to given preferences and ends, and that assess the (usually uncertain) consequences of alternative choices according to previously accepted maxims or decision rules.”\(^7\) Significantly, in pragmatic discourse, the values, norms, and decision rules to be applied are taken as given. This is in contrast to moral and ethical discourse, which focuses on defining values, norms and decision rules.

Moral discourse deals with questions of justice. These questions are not specific to a single group, rather they affect society as a whole. In moral discourse the “outcome turns on arguments showing that the interests embodied in contested norms are unreservedly universalizable.”\(^8\) Moral discourse is the foundation of a society-wide public sphere. It requires media and other forums that are accessible to all members of a society.

Ethical discourses are aimed at achieving self-understanding. In such discourses, “the participants want to get a clear understanding of themselves as members of a specific

\(^5\) *Id.*

\(^6\) HABERMAS, *supra* note 1, at 159.

\(^7\) *Id.* at 160.

\(^8\) *Id.* at 162.
nation, as members of a local community, as inhabitants of a region and so on.”

Participants in these discourses hope to determine “which traditions they will continue; they strive to determine how they will treat one another and how they will treat minorities and marginal groups.” This process of group identity formation requires that groups have “their own public spheres and media.” However, these public spheres should not be viewed as being separate from the society wide public sphere. Rather they should be visualized as structures that emerge within the larger public sphere.

Early democracies were small enough both in terms of geography and population that a vibrant public sphere could be built upon face-to-face interactions. In contrast, the size of modern democracies requires that the public sphere be brought together through the media. While the media is required to expand the public sphere beyond the realm of face-to-face interactions, the media’s ability to support the public sphere is as much a function of its ability to promote “fruitful and clarifying discussion” as its ability

---

9 Id. at 282.

10 Id.

11 C. Edwin Baker, Media, Markets, and Democracy 146 (2002). See also Nancy Fraser, Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy, in Habermas and the Public Sphere 109 (Craig Calhoun ed., 1992).

12 Habermas, supra note 1, at 373. See also Fraser supra 11 at 126


14 Habermas, supra note 1, at 374. See also Nicholas Garnham, The Media and the Public Sphere, in Habermas and the Public Sphere 109 (Craig Calhoun ed., 1992).
to reach large numbers of people. In order to promote “fruitful and clarifying discussion” the media must, in a general sense, perform at least two functions: (1) it must provide the public with information; and (2) it must serve as a forum for discourse.

The media’s ability to educate and inform the public is the basis of its role in generating the public sphere as well as supporting the democratic process. To provide the public with the information it needs to participate in the political process, the media must do two things: (1) it must carefully watch the sociopolitical environment and report on developments that are likely to affect the welfare of citizens; and (2) it must serve as the public’s watchdog, critically examining the political process and bringing any failures to the public’s attention.

In order to support the public sphere, the media must also serve as a forum for discourse. It is important to keep in mind that the public sphere emerges only as a result of discourse, and that there are three types of discourse – pragmatic, ethical and moral. Thus, the media must support debates among members of groups and societies on the application of accepted norms and values to various problems (pragmatic discourse) as well as support discourse that leads to the formation of those norms and values at both the sub-society or group level (ethical discourse) and at the society-wide level (moral discourse). To support pragmatic discourse, the media must, in a comprehensive and balanced manner, present to the public the problem under consideration, the applicable norms, values, decision rules, and the various solutions. To support moral discourse the

\(^{15}\)HABERMAS, supra note 1, at 362.
media must first and foremost be inclusive. To support ethical discourse the media needs to support “groups’ internal discursive and reflective needs for self-definition, cultural development, and value clarification.”\textsuperscript{16}

Not surprisingly, given the number of difficult, and occasionally contradictory, requirements with which the media must comply in order to support the public sphere, different portions of the media fulfill different requirements based on their business models. Thus, we can view the media as consisting of at least four sectors: (1) the core sector, (2) the civil media; (3) the professional sector; and (4) the private enterprise sector.\textsuperscript{17} The core sector facilitates moral discourse, bringing different groups together in the same public dialog, and encouraging agreement and compromise. The civil media facilitates ethical discourse. The next two sectors are as crucial as the first two in allowing the media to support discourse; however, unlike the first two they are unassociated with a specific form of discourse. The professional sector is independent of the state and the market. It consists of professionals that are free “of any obligations to serve any ideal other than internal professional standards.”\textsuperscript{18} The private enterprise sector is the sector of the media that is responsive to audience and advertiser demand. It, like the professional sector, is independent of government and composed of professionals; however, unlike the professional sector, it is beholden to the market. This

\textsuperscript{16} Id.

\textsuperscript{17} See James Curran, Mass Media and Democracy, in Mass Media and Society 105-11 (James Curran and Michael Gurevitch eds, 1991) (Curran actually has a fifth sector, the social market sector.) See also Baker, supra note 11, at 189

\textsuperscript{18} Baker, supra note 11, at 189
sector strives simultaneously to sell information and cultural artifacts to the public, and to sell the public to advertisers.

New media industries go through a process of commercialization, which moves them through a series of business models. The process culminates when a new medium’s industry adopts an advertiser support business model. The process of commercialization, which new media industries go through, proceeds in three phases. These phases are best demarcated by shifts in the business models utilized by that industry. Initially, a new medium’s industry focuses on selling information and cultural artifacts to the public. Over time, its business model shifts to selling the public to politicians and civil society actors. Finally, its business model evolves into selling the public to advertisers.

Natural processes of diffusion and adoption cause the shifts between the various business models. Diffusion theory tells us that all individuals in a society do not adopt an innovation at the same time; rather at different points different types of people adopt an innovation. Diffusion theory identifies five idealized adopter categories into which most people fall: (1) innovators, (2) early adopters, (3) early majority; (4) late majority; (5) laggards. The phases of commercialization described above entail shifts between the first three of these categories: innovators, early adopters, and the early majority. Each adopter category has a distinct socioeconomic status, a distinct set of personality attributes, and distinct communication behavior. These characteristics, in conjunction with economics of the industry, can explain the progression of business models.

---

19Everett M. Rogers, Diffusion of Innovation 267-92 (5th ed. 2003)
In the first phase of commercialization the business model is based on selling information and cultural goods to consumers; and those who adopt a medium in this phase are innovators. Innovators make up the first 2.5% of a population that adopt a technology. Their primary characteristic is venturesomeness, their interests in new ideas often lead them outside their local peer networks as a result they tend to have cosmopolite social networks, and are often friends or acquaintances of other innovators. As a general rule earlier adopters are better educated and have a higher social status than later adopters. They also have access to significant financial resources that help them absorb loses from unprofitable innovations. 20

During the second phase of commercialization, a medium becomes political, and its primary business is selling the public to civil society actors; during this phase early adopters dominate the medium’s industry. Early adopters make up 12.5% of the population. Their primary trait is a desire for respect, their aim is to serve their community and advance their group’s interests. They are generally localities who enjoy central positions in their social networks and exhibit high degrees of opinion leadership. 21

The shift to the final phase of commercialization occurs when the audience for a medium grows large enough that the medium becomes attractive to advertisers. As the audience for a medium grows, it comes to include members of the early majority. The early majority is the largest of the adopter groups, accounting for 33% of a social system.

20 Id.

21 ROGERS, supra note 41, at 283
The early majority is known for its deliberateness. Its members do not hold positions of leadership, nor do they hold central positions in social networks. Furthermore, they aren’t as well educated or as wealthy as the early adopters or the innovators.\(^{22}\)

When a medium’s industry enters the third phase of commercialization it loses its ability to support the public sphere. Once advertising-supported content enters a medium’s industry it will drive out the differentiated content of the previous phase.\(^{23}\) As the differentiated content of the previous phase is driven out of the market place, it will be replaced with content that adheres to the segmentation preferences of advertisers.\(^{24}\) The segmentation preferences of advertisers are toxic to the public sphere for two reasons: (1) the audiences favored by advertisers don’t correspond to authentic group interests and identities\(^{25}\); and (2) there are large segments of society that are not favored by advertisers.\(^{26}\) Because advertiser segmentation “neither necessarily nor uniformly reflects or responds to individuals’ or groups’ diverse concerns or interests”\(^{27}\) it undermines the ability of a medium to support ethical discourse— which requires discursive segmentation.\(^{28}\) Since, advertisers are not equally interested in all members of

\(^{22}\) Id.

\(^{23}\) C. Edwin Baker Advertising and a Democratic Press 73 (1994)

\(^{24}\) Id. at 25

\(^{25}\) Id. at 181

\(^{26}\) Id. at 178

\(^{27}\) Id. at 181

\(^{28}\) Id.
society; the media will inevitably under serve certain populations. This undermines the ability of a medium to support moral discourse—which requires inclusivity.

6.2 The American Newspaper Industry

The first phase of commercialization in the American newspaper industry began with the publication of Benjamin Harris’ *Publick Occurrences* in Boston and ended with the passage of the Stamp Act. Despite the fact that only one issue was printed before the colonial government abolished it, *Publick Occurrences* was the first newspaper published in the American colonies. Between the publication of *Publick Occurrences* and the passage of the stamp act, newspapers were successfully established in all but two colonies. Most were relatively apolitical. From time to time political squabbles would arise and publishers would be jailed—but this generally helped a newspaper’s circulation. The passage of the stamp act marked the start of the political period in the history of American newspapers.

The second phase of commercialization began with the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765 and ends with the publication of the first of the penny press. By 1765, more than 5% of the white population of the colonies subscribed to newspapers. From the perspective of diffusion theory, this percentage indicates that the shift from innovators to early adopters was well underway; likewise this percentage indicates that the shift from


30 For a history of the newspaper industry between the end of the revolutionary war and the rise of the penny press see CAROL SUE HUMPHERY, THE PRESS OF THE YOUNG REPUBLIC, 1783-1833 (1996)
the first phase to second phase of commercialization was also well underway. Historically, the first evidence of this transition is the response of the colonial newspapers to the stamp act. As the colonial opposition to the Revolutionary War took shape, the newspaper industry segmented along political lines—the Loyalist/Patriot divide. After the War a new batch of newspapers arose, which were divided along Federalist/Republican lines. Even as the Federalists faded from the public scene, the press’ political orientation remained. New parties founded new newspapers or enlisted the support of old ones.

The rise of the penny press in 1833 marks the beginning of the third phase of commercialization. The first penny paper was Benjamin H. Day’s New York Sun. The publication of this paper marks the beginning of a shift in the American Newspaper industry away from the partisan and mercantile press to a commercial press. This transformation began in 1833, picked up speed after the civil war, and continues today.

The transformation of the newspaper industry into an advertiser-supported industry, has adversely affected its ability to support the public sphere. The newspaper industry has increasingly modified its content to suit the preferences of advertisers. In particular, since advertisers are more interested in reaching certain audiences than others, the newspaper industry has come to target those audiences by creating content that speaks to their interests. Furthermore, in order to maximize profit, the newspaper industry has

31 For a history of the early portion of this phase see WILLIAM E. HUNTZICKER, THE POPULAR PRESS, 1833-1865 (1999); MENAHEM BLONDHEIM, NEWS OVER THE WIRES (1994); see also GERALD J. BALDASTY, THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF NEWS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY 30 (1992)
begun to actively curtail circulation among less preferred segments. As a result the newspaper industry is unable to support either ethical or moral discourse.

6.3 The American Blogosphere

The first phase of commercialization in the American blog industry began in January 1994 when Justin Hall launched Justin’s Home Page. It ended in July 1999 when Pitas, the first free build-your-own-weblog tool, was launched. Between Hall’s first posting and the time that Pitas was launched a few hundred blogs were started. Immediately after the release of Pitas, and other similar tools, the blogosphere exploded, growing, in less than a year, from a few hundred sites to thousands.

The bloggers of this phase could arguably be considered innovators: they were venturesome, well educated, had access to significant financial resources, and were part of cosmopolite social networks. The earliest bloggers and the earliest blog readers were, not surprisingly, technology professionals and enthusiasts. Many were entrepreneurs. They were well educated, and they lived in information technology hubs such as Seattle, San Francisco, and New York. Despite the fact that they were dispersed across the country, they formed a tight knit community.

Early blogs lacked a business model. Some asked for donations, as in the case of Justin Hall and Matt Hughey. Many considered blogging a means of self-promotion; and in fact many of the earliest bloggers attribute many of the professional opportunities that came their way to their blogs.

It is convenient to signal the beginning of the second phase of commercialization of the American blog industry with the launch of Pitas in May 1999, and demarcate its
end with the close of the American presidential election in November 2004. During this period the blogosphere experienced rapid growth and new blog forms emerged. Among them was the political blog. The political blog differed from the blogs of the early blogosphere in that they were both filters for information as well as news sources in their own right. During this period, political blogs were responsible for breaking and amplifying a number of important news stories. The actions of political bloggers are often cited as the proximate cause for many key political events during this period including the ousting of Trent Lott, the downfall of Dan Rather, and the rise of Howard Dean to national prominence. The presidential elections of 2004 served as a catalyst for the commercialization of the blogosphere. Candidates, hoping to target certain niche communities, bought significant amounts of advertising on blogs. The success of these advertisements demonstrated the usefulness of blogs as a medium for advertising.

This phase fits well with the theory under consideration. The blogosphere was deeply political. Bloggers exhibited a great many characteristics of early adopters: they were well off, politically active, localities and opinion leaders. Likewise, the readers of blogs in this era were relatively wealthy, politically active, and often characterized as opinion leaders. Even the non-political bloggers of this period conform to the theory: non-political bloggers tended to form small virtual communities that corresponded to their actually communities, which evidences their localism, their centrality to their community’s communications networks, as well as their tendency towards opinion leadership.
After the presidential election of 2004, the blogosphere began its transition into the third phase of commercialization. A Pew report on the state of blogging found that by the end of 2004, 27% of Internet users read blogs and 7% of Internet users had a blog. Weblog readers present a very attractive audience to advertisers; and blogs, given their ability to target very specific audiences, promise advertisers a better return on investment than traditional media. For example, in 2005, automaker Audi advertised its A3 model by buying ads on 286 blogs. The campaign was considered both successful and effective: Audi paid $50,000 in exchange for 68 million page views.

During this period, a number of successful advertiser based business models have emerged. The first is the “accidental tourist”. Here, “a lone writer who starts a blog as a mere hobby, wakes up one day to realize his audience is now as big as that of a small city newspaper.” These bloggers often sign up with advertising brokers, like Blogads or Google Ads, who handle the details of selling advertising. The second blogging business model is the “record-label approach.” Here, publishers fund lots of bloggers and hope that one or two will be extremely successful. Weblogs Inc., founded by Jason Calacanis, is a classic example of this approach. Weblogs Inc. has a single incredibly successful blog, Endgadget, and a number of much less successful blogs. America Online bought


33 Clive Thompson, Blogs to Riches: The Have and Have-Not's of the Blogging Boom, NEW YORK, Feb. 20, 2006

34 Thompson, supra note 54

35 Id.
Weblogs Inc. for $25 million in October of 2006. The third model is the “boutique approach”. In this case a publisher backs a few carefully selected blogs aimed at “some ineffable, deluxe readership.” Gawker media, founded by Nick Denton in 2002, is the prototypical example of this model. Denton has launched only 14 blogs. However, all of them are in “niches that target high spending, well-educated readers.” Within a day of AOL’s purchase of Weblogs Inc., Gawker Media entered into a deal with Dutch publisher NVU.

It is unclear to what extent this phase fits with theory. The evolution of the blogosphere has definitively entered a commercial phase: bloggers are making money through advertisements. Theory predicts that in this stage of commercialization we would see a decrease in partisan content as well as an attempt by bloggers to target and expand their audiences. While we aren’t necessarily noticing a decrease in partisan content we are seeing blogs being co-opted by the mainstream media and in the process losing much of their bite. Further, while individual bloggers aren’t necessarily making a special effort to target particular audiences, the owners of blog networks—by their own admission—take the demographics of a bloggers audience into account when making funding decisions. Theory also predicts that the key players in the industry at this point will fit the profile of early adopters. On the one hand, it could be argued that the owners

36 Id.
37 Id.
and operators of blog networks fit the profile of early majority. On the other hand, the bloggers of this phase are, by and large, the bloggers of the previous phase.

There are a number ways that we could build upon our understanding of the blogosphere as well as the theory presented here. Perhaps the most useful vector of inquiry would be a more rigorous study of industry participants. This thesis characterized industry participants as innovators, early adopters, or the early majority based solely on anecdotal evidence. It would be enormously helpful to use a more rigorous methodology to match industry participants with adopter categories.

6.4 A Link Analysis of the American Blogosphere

This thesis is concerned with the ability of the blogosphere to support discourse. One observable manifestation of discourse is conversation, a reciprocal exchange of ideas between two people. With the aim of understanding whether the blogosphere supports discourse, this chapter studies the prevalence and nature of conversation within the blogosphere. More specifically, this thesis examines the structure of the blogosphere to determine whether bloggers are participating in conversations with each other. It finds that conversation, as measured by reciprocity of permalinks, is the exception. It also finds that much of the conversation that does exist in the blogosphere is between members of the same group.

To analyze the structure of the blogosphere this study utilizes social network analysis as its research methodology. Social network analysis is a research methodology grounded in graph and systems theory, which attempts to explain social phenomenon
through a structural study of human interaction. The term social network refers to a set of actors and the ties among them. In social network analysis actors are interdependent and the linkages between them are channels for the flow of resources. In our case we are utilizing social network analysis to explore the blogosphere, the collection of all blogs and the links between them. In this case the links between blogs represent the transfer of thoughts between bloggers.

This study collects a series of snapshots of the blogosphere; where each snapshot represents the blogosphere’s response, modeled as a directed network, to an op-ed piece published in the Washington Post. In particular this study collected 78 such snapshots, corresponding to 78 op-ed pieces published on the Washington Post web site during the last week of March 2006 and the first week of April 2006. These snapshots were collected using a ‘snowball’ sampling approach, in which each sample was ‘grown’ from a single seed—the uniform resource locator (URL) of an op-ed piece. From this seed, the network was grown in an iterative manner that utilized data collected by the weblog tracking service Technorati to discover and follow inbound-permalinks.

The data was analyzed in two ways. First, each ‘snapshot’ was examined for the presence of permalink reciprocity. This analysis was used to draw conclusions about the tendency of the blogosphere toward political discourse. Secondly, in those cases where evidence of link reciprocity was found, the data was more closely examined to see

39 For primers on Social Network Analysis see STANLEY WASSERMAN AND KATERINE FAUST, SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS (1999); JOHN SCOTT, SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS: A HANDBOOK (2nd ed., 2000)

40 WASSERMAN AND FAUST, supra note 6.
whether the links were between members of a particular ideological group (conservative or liberal) or between members of different ideological groups. This analysis helps us draw conclusions about the nature of the discourse that may be present in the blogosphere.

The first stage of our analysis, an examination of the blogosphere for evidence of conversation as evidenced by reciprocity, showed that the conversation is the exception rather than the norm. Seventy-eight ‘snapshots’ were examined, corresponding to the blogosphere’s reaction to 78 Washington Post editorials. Of the 78 samples, 45 had no links between blogs. As a result their reciprocity indices were undefined. Of the remaining 33 samples, all but 4 of them had either negative or zero values for both reciprocity indices. Thus, conversation in the blogosphere is more the exception than the norm.

The dearth of conversation in the blogosphere, with regard to op-ed pieces, is consistent with the theory presented in chapter two. The theory predicts that in the third stage of commercialization a medium losses its ability to support discourse. Thus, this result may simply indicate that the process of commercialization has already stripped the blogosphere of its ability to support wide spread political discourse.

The second stage of our analysis showed that bloggers tend to link to other bloggers of a similar political orientation. In this stage we examined the four samples that had positive values greater than zero for both reciprocity indices to determine the extent to which conversations were between members of different ideological groups. Using various methods, the political orientations of blogs in these four snapshots were
identified. Unfortunately, it was impossible—given our methods—to determine the orientation of a large number of these blogs. This makes the data from this stage a little difficult to interpret. However, it is still possible to draw some tentative conclusions. In each of the four snap shots that we examined both liberal and conservative bloggers were represented. Conservative bloggers are better represented than liberal bloggers. Links between conservative bloggers were more prevalent than links between any other types of bloggers. Intra-group links were more prevalent than inter-group links. However, inter-group links were present in three of the four samples.

It is unclear the extent to which this result conforms to theory. The theory predicts that in the third phase of commercialization there will be a trend toward homogeneity, that more and more blogs may become neutral in an attempt to increase their readership. As a result of this trend, we would expect to see less partisanship and less intra-group discourse. To a certain extent the results of this study offer evidence both in support of the theory presented in chapter two, and against it. On the one hand, the data—contradicting theory—shows that there is a significant amount of partisanship and intra-group discourse in the blogosphere. On the other hand, the fact that the political orientation of a large number of blogs was unclear may provide some support for the theory. Our difficulty in determining the political orientation of a large number of blogs could mean several things. One possibility is that the methods used to identify the political orientation of bloggers were wanting. Another possibility is that the bloggers are—consistent with our theory—attempting to appeal to a broad audience and thus moving away from partisan content. Yet another possibility is the blogosphere hasn’t
completed the process of commercialization: it may still be in the process of transitioning from phase two (the political phase) to phase three (the commercial phase). The American newspaper industry took many decades to become fully commercialized; for decades after the rise of the penny press, the partisan press continued to exist and thrive. Likewise, even though we have seen clear signs of the commercialization of the blogosphere it may yet take some time for partisan content to be driven to marginality.

Our understanding of discourse in the blogosphere is far from complete. There are a number of facets of the blogosphere that would benefit from further investigation. For example, this study, nor any other study, rigorously attempts to determine whether conversations within the blogosphere fit the definition of discourse. This study assumes that conversations within the blogosphere are a form of discourse, a verification of this assumption would go a long way to validating the findings of this study. Further, this study, like most studies of the blogosphere, focuses on inter-blog conversations: conversations between bloggers. It would be interesting to reverse this focus and qualitatively examine intra-blog conversations: conversations that take place among blog readers in the comments section of the blog. Finally, it would be useful to have a deeper understanding of the relationship between the blogosphere and the mainstream media. We know that the mainstream media often activates discussion within the blogosphere. However, we do not know what types of mainstream media artifacts have this effect.

6.5 Conclusion

This thesis has laid out a theory of the evolution of new media industries that has negative implications for democracy. It has laid out two cases that support this theory to
different extents. The case of the newspaper industry seems to strongly support it. The case of the American blogosphere, on the other hand, confirms the theory in some ways and calls it into question in others.