

The Evolutional Genesis of Blogs and the Integration of Communication Networks

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INTRODUCTION

This proposition is the result of a research conducted with the intent of mapping the evolution of blogging divided in stages, in which we observe an evolutionary path with chronological milestones set by the different focus on the product, production and forms of content dissemination. In this course, blogs are perceived as consolidators of the social web or web 2.0. The research was carried on by contemplating an analysis of the expansion of participatory spaces with the support of Information and Communications Technology for a proposed genealogy of blogs. These moments are not linear nor mutually exclusive and can be currently seen as part of the bloggers culture and their spaces in the web.

During its evolutionary trajectory¹, blogs have gone through different phases, which, according to Malini and Waichert (2008), can be divided in four different stages: i) the filter phase; ii) the personal diaries; iii) the informational phase; and, iv) the professional phase (Malini & Waichert, 2008).

In this context, the article presents an addition to these four phases, establishing a discussion grounded in the proposition of a fifth phase, that constitutes now the mobile phase, at which bloggers use the social web as a strategy for dissemination of their spaces and expansion of their audiences, in line with social networking websites. This fifth phase is also characterized by the proliferation of the utilization of mobile devices to access the Internet. At this stage there is also

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a change in the way content is produced, in the maintenance of spaces created earlier and in the dynamics of the blogosphere, creating a new locus of action in the social network: the socialsphere. It is also the time when the routines and strategies for the maintenance of blogs may be considered well-established for its use as a communication tool for businesses.

Thus, at the end of the first decade of this century, with the development of mobile computing and new nomadic technologies (laptops, palmtops, cellphones), bloggers follow underway at the stage of ubiquitous pervasive and sentient computing, insisting on mobility. In the age of the connectivity, in which mobile devices are used for the updating of all sorts of spaces, blogs are interwoven with other areas/services on the web, what characterizes a rupture with the frontiers previously set under terminologies such as twittersphere or blogosphere, creating a hybrid territory where the social web spaces communicate and form macro-spheres, or macro-communities in the Internet. These communities go beyond the fixed services, such as traditional blog creation, located only by their URLs.

Considering this scenario, this paper presents a classification divided in phases, which shows an evolutionary route with chronological milestones established by the product, the production and the forms of content dissemination in blogs. These moments are not linear nor mutually exclusive and can be seen currently as part of the bloggers' culture of and their spaces.

The intention of this article is to perform an exploratory study on the history of blogging as a form

of post-massive communication with other spaces, aiming to build proposals based on the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) that would contribute to new models of communication networks.

BACKGROUND

The first stage, which is still a current characteristic of blogs, is the filter phase (Blood, 2000; Granieri, 2005; Malini & Waichert, 2008), whose particularity leads to a usage of bloggers often referring links to various web spaces that they consider relevant to the topics covered in the post. At this moment, even though it happened before the creation of the term weblog, many researchers consider the webpage created by Tim Berners-Lee², as the first blog.

According to Blood (2000), there was a series of webpages that selected and divulged links to interesting spaces on the web³. “Hence the term ‘web’ + log, which was used by Jorn Barger to describe the activity of ‘logging the web’” (Amaral, Recuero, & Montardo, 2008). Thereafter, certain usages and social practices began to take shape, based on the habits of web forums and chats.

It is important to point out that, in this first stage, the blogs did not look like what they do today. Only a small number of such pages existed on the web (Blood, 2000; Marlow, 2005). They “were simple and basic, including texts and hypertext links or references to other websites (virtually no video or audio)” (Prudkin, 2010, p. 128).

The explanation for such a small number of blogs on the web was the requirement of specialization. The user was obliged to surpass a number of technical obstacles, such as the need for HTML expertise, and only those with the ability to operate the code had their own webpages (Blood, 2000).

In the second phase, that of personal diaries, blogs begin to serve as a personal notepad (Lemos, 2002). The emergence of this stage is concomitant with the first phase, since this sort of appropriation could already be observed at the beginning of weblogs (Blood, 2000). Cyberdiaries, webdiaries or weblogs are contemporary practices of online writing, where ordinary users write about their private lives, about their areas of personal interest or other aspects of contemporary culture (Lemos, 2002, p. 3).

Justin Hall, a pioneer of the online diaries, began its space on the Internet in January 1994 at 21 years of age, with Justin’s Links from the Underground⁴. These blogs, considered as diaries, started to be used as “autobiographical” spaces (Amaral, Recuero, & Montardo, 2008). Definition not accepted by some authors such as Primo (2008), contrary to the idea of personal diaries: “Personal diaries turn to the intrapersonal, are addressed to the author himself. Blogs, on the other hand, aim at the interpersonal, the group” (p. 122).

Lemos (2002) suggests that “the emergence of these personal webpages is related to the new possibilities that the cyberspace technologies bring to liberate the emission pole” (p. 2). The author believes that blogs are, along with games, chats and social software, one of the most popular phenomena of cyberculture.

The development of a technology that simplified the posting comes to enable the expansion of blogs and represents a milestone for the transition to the informational phase (Malini & Waichert, 2008). The appearance of the first service for creating, editing and publishing blogs, Pitas, followed by the launch of Blogger⁵, in 1999 (Blood, 2000), allowed the expanded use of the post-massive format. Considering only the first nine months of operation of the service, Blogger reached the figure of 40,000 users (Orihuela, 2007).

The development of these services has made the website creation process more user-friendly. Even though the weblog is developed in HTML, the user does not necessarily have proficiency on the codes, for the reason that the composition tools consist of easily recognizable templates and cognitive icons (Silva, 2003). The formula in which these services are based is 2 in 1: Content Management Systems plus free hosting. “It is the end of handcrafted blogs managed by publishers ‘What You See Is What You Get’ (WYSIWYG) like DreamWeaver and FrontPage” (Orihuela, 2005, p. 51).

The ease of creating pages, the simplicity in the blogs use and the free service are always associated to the popularity of blogs among Internet users. Orihuela (2005) considers the possibility that anyone with Internet access can create a blog and publish information online, a revolution comparable to the one brought by the first printing press in the fifteenth century. This is a point of rupture with the other ways of content production on the web and one of the characteristics of the web 2.0 services.

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