The Impact of Digital Blogosphere on Lebanese Journalism: Continuity or Substitution?

By

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Abstract

Journalism has witnessed many changes throughout its existence. One of the most threatening changes to this industry was the introduction of the Internet and digital blogs. Many editors have debunked the use and credibility of blogs and citizen journalists (a modern term linked to those who report news without having any journalistic background). In the 21st century, the printed press could be losing its previous popularity to the Internet. This study applies Carry's theoretical approach on cultural communication to emphasize on the probable impact of modern blogs on conventional journalism. A survey conducted among communication Arts students from four renowned universities from Beirut, Lebanon to explore whether the latter is a form of reincarnation of journalism or its death. By applying 'Functional Equivalence' and 'Media Diversity' sub-theories, this paper examines the relationship between age, gender, major, sources of news, types of news and interaction with blogs. A cross-tabulation analysis is applied to the survey to showcase the relationship between the chosen variables, in the effort of answering the research questions and interpreting the proposed hypotheses about the influence of digital blogosphere on Journalism. What is to come out of this study is a common ground between blogging and orthodox journalism, while highlighting the new doors blogging might open for journalists all over the globe.

Keywords: *Lebanon, Communication Arts Students, Blogs, Journalism, Functional Equivalence, Media Diversity, Sources of news, Types of news, Interaction with blogs*

1. Introduction

Journalism was first used as a way of conveying the government's rules in addition to political and war updates. From its early start dated to the 1830's, with the strong establishment of 'Agence France-Presse' (AFP) that distributed news from France to foreign clientele, to the foundation of Reuter in London (1851) and Wolffs Telegraphisches Bureau in Berlin (1849), news agencies proceeded in many cities around the world, serving international news from all backgrounds to big and small companies (Unwin, Tucker, and Unwin, 2017). These news agencies brought the attention to the immense need for news, by both educated and illiterate people, making it a profitable business.

According to Heinrich (2012), traditional journalists conveyed their messages authoritatively to the readers. They gathered themselves as proficient objective bodies who deliver worthy news under the supervision of their organizations. The worthy news were encoded to the readers as a one-way communication disregarding their response.

Karin and Thomas (2009) argued that journalism has gained a freedom of expression like never before and is now more diverse than ever. The seventeenth century witnessed the rise of the present concept of an "argumentative, analytical and sovereign" ways of covering the news.

However, with the introduction of the World Wide Web in the 1990's, most newspapers turned to digitizing their articles in a way to gain a wider readership that would go beyond locals and the older generation. Around that time blogs began to surface.

There are obvious differences between blogging and journalism. Blogs are easy-to-create web pages that are run by opinionated individuals covering multiple topics, from politics, entertainment, fashion, to scientific and environmental. They are described as participatory, transparent and opinionated (Lasica, 2003; Wall, 2004, 2005; Heinrich, 2012). Conversely, journalism, as a field, is a whole institution run by experienced editors and is subject to penalties if crossing the law. The traditional values of journalism are accuracy, fairness, and objectivity (International Federation of Journalists, 1986; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001; McQuail, 2000; Society of Professional Journalists, 1996).

Both of these powerful media have shaped the world and public opinion throughout time, the most recent of them being blogs. The latter, barely 20 years old, is now shaping its traditional counterpart as well; by using new, immediate, and transparent way of news coverage. Heinrich (2012) contended that bloggers transmit the news by a dynamic, interactive, challenging, global and "multidirectional" means which totally contradicts with customary journalists who are still reporting as exclusive suppliers of news. Braking news are immediate, prompt and shared by everyone from bloggers to citizen journalists or even activists across borders all over the world.

Moreover, Greer & Yan (2011) posited the term "user-generated content" to describe the role of Twitter and Facebook of conveying the news based on audiences' wants rather than those of the media. Their findings revealed that 75% of the Americans who count on online news do so by forwarding them via e-mails or social media. Furthermore, 52% of them obtain the news through sharing social media links.

According to Hong (2012), an interesting study conducted by Pew Research in 2010 showed that the "Internet popularity" had outdone old-style newspapers and television since the survey reported that 33% of cell phones owners read the news from their devices and 37% through their social media accounts. Such statistics point to what Hong referred to as a "portable and participatory" relationship between news and readers.

Another further interesting study led in 2016 by Pew Research Center, a well-established American "fact tank", followed closely the American presidential election to deduce which media platforms were mostly used by the people to acquire news on this matter. It appeared that 62% of U.S. adult citizens rely on social media to get their daily dose of news. The study also stressed on the fact that over $60 billion being spent by advertisers on the web in 2015, which means that almost all profits went to only a few major companies including Facebook, Twitter, Google, and Yahoo. The impact of these virtual tech companies on the journalism industry surpassed its finances; it had changed the "very core elements of the news industry itself" (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Subsequently, to illustrate the loss of newspapers for advertising revenues, the Guardian and the Telegraph, English newspapers among other well-established newspapers were asking their readers to donate money so they could fund their reporters and investigative journalists. They acknowledged the fall of advertising revenues, thus they resorted to this method instead of implementing paid subscriptions. "Unlike many news organizations we haven't put up a paywall - we want to keep our journalism as open as we can" says The Guardian's window that pops up on their website and mobile applications at the end of each article published.

Accordingly, statistics from the WordPress.com- one of the earliest blogs and a major publishing platform which offers subdomains or independent domains for bloggers and companies to create their own blog or website- revealed that up until February 2017, over 409 million people around the globe

viewed more than 22.2 billion pages each month. While users produced around 76.9 million new posts and 41.4 million new comments each month.

The study also showed a large interest in popular blogs by huge media conglomerates. 'Vox Media', founded by SportsBlogs, Inc. in 2002, has been massively funded by NBC Universal in 2015 with $200 million and an additional $100 million by NBC Universal's parent company, Comcast. During the same year, the same amount of money was invested by the latter conglomerates in 'Buzz Feed', an American media company founded in 2006 by blog authors/owners Jonah Peretti, John Johnson, and Kenneth Lerer. Other major blogs like 'Business Insider' and 'Huffington Post' are also largely funded by such media outlets that made their worth goes up to half a billion dollars.

However, the purpose of this query is to examine the extent to which media outlets are transforming prevailing blogs into journalistic ones that would work in their favor and whether their outdated format of presenting news can only be rejuvenated by acquisition of new formats such as blogging. Successively, the study interrogates whether blogs are changing the way journalists are doing their job. If it is so, does it count as a bad or good change? Are blogs independent from the journalistic field?

This study attempts at applying James Carey's sub-theories on 'Cultural Approach of Communication' to clarify the type of relationship prevailing between those two spheres, it is then easy to draw the lines based on where the changes are occurring. It is utterly important to recognize the impact of new media on its ancestor. According to Charles (2012) journalists are relying more and more on bloggers and their posts. It is noticed in many newspapers' articles how reporters are basing their work on bloggers' posts. This means that nowadays bloggers are getting better at investigating and bringing new social happenings to the limelight. The blogosphere, as it is now called due to its fast growing community, has led many to ask 'What is the difference between journalism and blogging?' and 'Are bloggers journalists?'

2. Literature Review

Lowrey (2006) argued that conventional writers and reporters are being more or less forced to follow the rules set by the big corporations they work for. Such big corporations are less lenient toward change, and more dedicated to making profit and keeping their investors happy, not to mention the bulk of censored and controlled news being fed to the audience; the same audience that lacks media literacy skills to be able to differentiate between articles based on reliable sources versus those filled with biased opinions.

In fact, one needs to mention that journalists have changed throughout the years to remain on top of the news industry. Nevertheless, they have all the advantages of receiving the news first since they work in organizations which have hierarchy, chance of promotion, fixed salary, invitations to seminars and conferences, as well as the chance to develop their reporting skills through years of experience, contacts, and editors' help.

However, as the saying goes, with great power comes great responsibility. Journalists are always under the watch of the government; they have laws to abide by and rules of ethics to follow. What could be an advantage for journalists hired by news corporations could turn into a disadvantage at some point. Due to economical hassles, the integrity of journalists is compromised so that their work guarantees the corporation's survival (Lowrey, 2006). This could mean following a marketing or entertainment direction at the cost of offering the public an in-depth and meaningful coverage and opinion (Beam, 1990; McManus, 1994).

On the other hand, bloggers are individuals who might not have been always recognized by big companies, the government, or even international or local conferences. According to Felix (2011), bloggers have to go the extra mile and work double the amount to create a name for them that is both credible and reliable. "It's still possible to make a name for yourself by starting a blog!"

Blogs function in their own unique way. One blogger can be a columnist, reporter, analyst and publisher, all simultaneously from behind their laptop or phone (Lasica, 2002). A single post can include news, comments, and demand the readers and policymakers to make change (Davis, 2008). Nonetheless, Skube (2007) argued that bloggers' writing is free from most of the traditional obligations which leads to a typical competitive relationship between bloggers and journalists.

On one hand, the virtual leaders of news are proving to be more diverse when it comes to topics reported, while allowing conversations and commentaries to take place between readers and blog owners. This freedom of speech and communication, whether biased or unbiased, is the reason behind the blogosphere's fast growing following. What is also worth mentioning is the high number of bloggers who have a journalistic background. Based on a 2007 study led by Perlmutter and Schoen, from the Journal of Mass Media Ethics (JMME), 12 out of 30 American political blogs have owners with journalism experience.

While on the other hand, a Harvard discussion paper published in 2008, pointed that the freedom of expression experienced by bloggers and their followers is changing the "norms of journalism." Journalists can and have the chance to write like bloggers, but the latter will be thrown under the bus and be criticized by readers if their writings are altered to that of a journalist. Whether or not all journalists will conform to the blogging style of writing, it is an ongoing big debate.

Wells (2011) advocated live bloggings as a technique of reporting an unfolding event or a short post by broadcasting them lively on the web. In his opinion, this technique is acknowledged for its transparency, immediacy, and audience involvement. Thus, live blog is not the end or death of journalism; it is certainly a newer and brighter future of this old industry.

Nonetheless, Bruns (2005) proposed the term 'gate-watching' to coin the conventional and modern journalists, citizen journalists, and bloggers, who are presently playing the role of gate-watchers. They keep an eye on news they believe is worth sharing depending on their personal interests or their readers' interest, compiling all information gathered around this piece of news, and sharing it with the audience. A quite accurate quote applies to this study "the news may be too important to leave to the journalists alone" said by German-born American sociologist, Herbert Gans in 1980.

However, Bruns and Highfield (2012) contended that gatekeeping, controlling or limiting the access to specific information, is a major role in the news field -- a role so dearly held by editors. Ever since the emergence of blogs and websites, information has been flowing from many people through one source. The gates have increased exponentially exceeding all supervision and guidance, and it is becoming harder for editors to oversee them.

Just like the book printing industry had to either invest in e-books or collaborate with companies like Amazon to digitize their books so they could meet the requirements of the fast growing advanced technology and cater to the needs of the people using the latter, the journalism industry had to do the same. Businesses tend to change depending on what is changing around them; they are influenced by external occurrences (Zetka, 2001). Due to technological developments and the market/audience's need, field of works follow what is most profitable so they wouldn't lag behind. Moreover, it is not recent that journalists have altered their judgments, interpretations, and management regarding the upsurge of new competitive fields such as public relations (McQuail, 2000; Schudson, 1978). Such alteration indicated that journalists have always tried their best to adapt to changes around them.

In a seminar conducted in 2010 by Pew Research center on how new media is transforming journalism, Jim Brady, President of Digital Strategies at Allbritton Communications, pointed to the future plans of

partnership with local bloggers to exploit a sort of scandalous move in the news space. Moreover, most communities and neighborhoods have their own local blogs that update inhabitants of a specific area of news happening around them. Instead of hiring several reporters - which could be costly if they are sent across the country or abroad, including accommodation, meals, and transportation, all on company's expenses - a collaboration with blogger who already have an established blog proves to be cheaper and more time efficient (Brady, 2010).

Blogosphere in Lebanon

Lebanon is not a typical Arab country. According to Joseph (1999) "The self is neither individualistic nor collective." This image of independence starts with a clear description of Lebanon's identity as a country and as people. It rather incorporates and changes what the 'self' and 'other' do and how they act according to each other.

Furthermore, not to drift deeper into history, Lebanon has a poor infrastructure; the latter is massively important for all sort of telecommunication activities in a country. In a survey issued in 2009 by International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Lebanon ranked first in highest usage of internet per population with 26.28%, while the MENA region's population combined reached 19.54% and 22.13% in the world. The excessive number of emigration in Lebanon is a major factor that encouraged the welcoming of a fast technological integration in the country (Taki, 2010). Almost a decade later, with its nearly six-million population, Lebanon has four million and a half internet users, with a 75.9% activity (IWS, 2017).

The popularity and increase of Lebanese blogs took off rapidly in both 2005 and 2006, after late Prime Minister Rafic Hariri's assassination and the 33-day Israeli war on Lebanon (Riegert and Ramsay, 2013). The Lebanese blogosphere enlarged substantially especially inside Lebanon with hundreds of new blogs being created (Haugbolle, 2007). Lebanese blogs offered a new platform for the young audience who are not as knowledgeable as the older generation, to comment on political issues and other miscellaneous topics even if they had limited knowledge of Blogs could have shattered a "monopoly of middle aged journalists" when it comes to influencing public opinion. The Lebanese blogosphere has produced a modern and crucial connection between diaspora communities and Lebanon, as well as between "academia" and the press (ibid). Based on this, the blogosphere grew larger during the 2006 war; this is when all Lebanese abroad thoroughly followed the news via blogs and the usual mainstream media, whether it being television, radio, or local and international newspapers.

However, an interesting plot twist led this war to become the most blogged about war in history ever since the Iraq war took place in 1991, grabbing the attention of international media outlets (Ward, 2007). Lebanese English-written blogs such as 'Siege Notes' and 'Beirut Journal, along with others,' were contributing to 'non-mediated, non-formatted' updates about the war (Salti, 2009). The essential part of this contribution was the fact that all messages conveyed through blogs were written as is. It is not arguable that they were opinionated pieces, but the important aspect was the uncensored and direct information by the Lebanese who are living the atrocity of the war. No editors or big heads were gatekeeping this medium (Harb, 2009).

Rasha Salti, the Lebanese writer behind 'Siege Notes' was able to transfer live images of the war, tapping on international reach, including Israeli media. Some parties of the latter showed support; first by an Israeli TV reporter who shared Salti's message on her TV program, then by Israeli intellectuals and artists who showed support and asked her to continue writing and were actively circulating her words around Israel (ibid). Another case related to the 2006 Lebanese-Israeli war, was that of Hanady Salman, editor of Lebanese daily newspaper 'Assafir', and author of 'Beirut Journal' blog. Through her journalistic experience, Salman managed to spread the word to all her foreign contacts; all that via her personal blog, and not the major newspaper she works for. Her blog posts reached international media outlets such as

'The New York Times', 'The Herald Tribune', and 'The Guardian', creating an outstanding fuss on a large scale (Harb, 2009).

The fluctuation of Lebanese blogs did not stop after the events of 2005 and 2006. On the contrary, a new generation of eager young bloggers appeared; most of them showed great social, environmental, economic, and human rights interests. Some were labeled as activists as well (Riegert, 2015). A prime trait of well-liked Lebanese bloggers is the employment of humor, satire, and sarcasm as an evaluation tool to assess local businesses and social power structures (Riegert and Ramsay, 2013). A good number of popular Lebanese bloggers were offered opportunities in mainstream media such as 'talk show hosts or popular magazine writers' while others followed less profitable organizations like NGOs or became freelance journalists (Riegert, 2015).

Arab bloggers have had their share of influence on conventional media outlets, which then created a larger influence on the public opinion (Hamady, 2009) thus generating a dominos effect. Arab media professionals took notice of the rising popularity of Arab bloggers and the way they were able to alter the Arab media landscape at such a fast rate. They acknowledged the rivalry and started incorporating their maxims in the reportage and interviewing bloggers in talk shows to praise their honesty (ibid).

The attention Arab bloggers gained from Western media outlets was outstanding. They were somehow glorified by the West. To materialize this idea, a few examples of Western media outlets can be named; The Financial Times, The Washington Post, The Observer, the CNN and ABC networks, were amongst those who have 'glamorized' Arab bloggers for their will to demand reform and abolish corruption (Ambah, 2006). One of the most dominant Arab media organizations, Al Jazeera, has embraced bloggers' technique of instant updates generated by citizen journalists while using brief reports, videos, comments, links from Israel, Gaza and the West Bank, and combine these reports after verification with pinpointed locations on a virtual map (Shachtman, 2009).

'Functional Equivalence' and 'Media Diversity': The Theoretical Framework

From a 'Cultural Approach of Communication' perspective, in the 1990s, J.W Carey developed the 'Functional Equivalence' and the 'Media Diversity' interconnected sub-theories. The 'Functional equality' targets the way new media tend to replace old media; for example, a television set swiftly replaced a radio handle, mobile phones replaced landlines, and so on with every new technology that becomes available to the public. In the case of functional equality, digital content replaced the printed one; websites overtook newspapers, and blogs are doing the same with average websites. While 'media diversity' focuses on people's preference to follow diverse media owned by local firms or individuals of various ethnic, educational, gender, or professional backgrounds (Neuman, 2010).

New Media is any content available on the Internet and is reached through digital technologies. Websites like online newspapers, blogs, among others are all examples of new media. What's common amongst these media is the availability of interaction they offer to the users. Anyone using any medium that falls under the 'New Media' umbrella is given the option to comment, share, add information, create content and photos, and interact with other users. The world is witnessing the rise of the Internet; a network that connects every individual through audio, video, text, and all sort of online multimedia. It is merging 'interpersonal and mass communication' as well as 'public and private communication' (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003: 322).   Neuman (2010) argued that new media will alter the meaning of geographic distance, allow for a huge increase in the volume of communication, provide the possibility of increasing the speed of communication, provide opportunities for interactive communication, and allow forms of communication that were previously separate to overlap and interconnect (Nwanguma, Uchechi, and Queen, 2015).

Having a clear image of what 'new media' is, makes it easier to understand why blogs fit perfectly under this category, and why most bloggers especially in Lebanon claim new media is the future, and that they are the "new journalists" (Davis, 2008).

Research Questions

According to information architect Jesse James Garrett, in 1999 there was only 23 blogs on the internet, while more recent studies done by Technorati, a publisher advertising platform, this number skyrocketed to hit 50 million blogs by the year 2006 (Chapman, 2011). Consequently, Carey developed the 'Functional Equivalence' and 'Media Diversity' interconnected sub-theories to analyze the way new media have a tendency to replace old media and shift people's preferences to follow (Neuman, 2010). Therefore, based on the aforementioned sub-theories, this study focuses on exploring the impact of digital blogs on journalism through the readers' predisposition to follow blogs more than the old ways of news publication and how this can affect journalists' way of doing their job. Thus, the study attempts at investigating the following questions:

1. How popular are blogs in Lebanon?
2. What age range reads blogs the most?
3. Is "media diversity" a reason for people changing the source of reading news?
4. With reference to "functional equivalence," will blogs affect the way journalists are reporting news?
5. Will the digital blogosphere cause the death of journalism or its continuity?

3. Methodology

The quantitative data collection entailed a survey questionnaire based on closed-ended questions to provide measurable findings on how new media is affecting journalism, how people perceive digital blogs versus traditional journalism and how journalists are being affected by bloggers. The researchers relied on a cluster sample by sending out 76 questionnaires to the administration of four known universities in Lebanon that hold communication arts departments.

Survey Design and Procedures

A questionnaire of 18 questions attempted at examining the popularity of blogs in Lebanon, the age range of those who read blogs, the "functional equivalence" of new media competing with traditional ones, the "media diversity" as a reason for people changing the source of reading news, and the way blogs are affecting journalists reporting. Thus, it is useful to have statistics to materialize the number of Lebanese college students who read blogs to explain the relationship between bloggers and traditional journalists.

Sample Selection

The sample comprised college students from the communication arts field majoring in journalism, public relations and radio television since the chosen three best prepare the intellectuals who are to handle the media in the future and are keen on using technology. Four reputable universities were identified in the Beirut region to participate in the study. The researcher then utilized a cluster sample being a method in which groups of people that embody the population are recognized and involved in the sample (Ahmed, 2009).

The researchers submitted 76 questionnaires to the administration of each of the four universities which in turn distributed them to students at their discretion. At the end of the survey, 304 students from the chosen universities participated and noted their opinion concerning blogs and their impact on the journalism industry.

4.   Results and Findings

To determine how the digital blogosphere is influencing traditional reporting, the researchers selected blogs popularity, age, functional equivalence, and media diversity as the main variables to be measured. The results were reported by using cross-tabulation to show the relationship between the variables and analyzed by applying descriptive statistics.

Table 1: Major vs Source of News vs Gender Cross-tabulation

Gender				Newspaper	Electronic Newspaper	Social Media	Blogs	Others	Total
					Source of News				
male	Major	Journalism	Count	3	16	17	24	1	61
			% within Major	4.9%	26.2%	27.9%	39.3%	1.6%	100.0%
			% within Source of News	42.9%	72.7%	54.8%	50.0%	50.0%	55.5%
		Public Relations	Count	2	2	3	13	1	21
			% within Major	9.5%	9.5%	14.3%	61.9%	4.8%	100.0%
			% within Source of News	28.6%	9.1%	9.7%	27.1%	50.0%	19.1%
		Radio and Television	Count	2	4	11	11	0	28
			% within Major	7.1%	14.3%	39.3%	39.3%	0.0%	100.0%
			% within Source of News	28.6%	18.2%	35.5%	22.9%	0.0%	25.5%
	Total		Count	7	22	31	48	2	110
			% within Major	6.4%	20.0%	28.2%	43.6%	1.8%	100.0%
			% within Source of News	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
female	Major	Journalism	Count	6	36	24	50	7	123
			% within Major	4.9%	29.3%	19.5%	40.7%	5.7%	100.0%
			% within Source of News	54.5%	70.6%	64.9%	57.5%	87.5%	63.4%
		Public Relations	Count	3	10	5	23	1	42
			% within Major	7.1%	23.8%	11.9%	54.8%	2.4%	100.0%
			% within Source of News	27.3%	19.6%	13.5%	26.4%	12.5%	21.6%
		Radio and Television	Count	2	5	8	14	0	29
			% within Major	6.9%	17.2%	27.6%	48.3%	0.0%	100.0%
			% within Source of News	18.2%	9.8%	21.6%	16.1%	0.0%	14.9%
	Total		Count	11	51	37	87	8	194
			% within Major	5.7%	26.3%	19.1%	44.8%	4.1%	100.0%
			% within Source of News	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

To examine how popular blogs are among young potential Lebanese future journalists, this cross-tabulation data reveals the relationships between gender, major, and sources of their news. 63.38% of respondents are females versus 36.62 % are males. 63.4% of 194 female respondents are studying Journalism, 21.6% are studying Public Relations, and 14.9% are studying Radio and Television. 55.5% of 110 male respondents are studying Journalism, 19% are studying Public Relations, and 25.5% are studying Radio and Television. Moreover, female students of all three majors combined, rely on blogs as a source of news by 44.8%, on electronic newspapers by 26.3%, on social media by 19%, and on newspapers by 5.7%. As for male students of all three majors combined, they rely on blogs as a source of news by 43.6%, on electronic newspapers by 20%, on social media by 28.2% and on newspapers by only 6.4%. Therefore, the majority of both gender are majoring journalism and almost equally likely to rely on blogs and other electronic media to obtain news.

Table 2: Interact vs Type of Blogs vs Reason for Interacting Cross-tabulation

Reason for Interacting	Interact-Share and Comment			Type of Blog						Total
				Religious	Politics	Entertainments	Technology	Food &Travel	Others	
Freedom of Expression	Interact-Share and Comment	yes	Count	2	13	33	31	6	1	86
			% within Interact-Share and Comment	2.3%	15.1%	38.4%	36.0%	7.0%	1.2%	100.0%
			% within Type of Blog	100.0%	72.2%	76.7%	83.8%	66.7%	100.0%	78.2%
		No	Count	0	5	10	6	3	0	24
			% within Interact-Share and Comment	0.0%	20.8%	41.7%	25.0%	12.5%	0.0%	100.0%
			% within Type of Blog	0.0%	27.8%	23.3%	16.2%	33.3%	0.0%	21.8%
	Total		Count	2	18	43	37	9	1	110
			% within Interact-Share and Comment	1.8%	16.4%	39.1%	33.6%	8.2%	0.9%	100.0%
			% within Type of Blog	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Variety of New Topics	Interact-Share and Comment	yes	Count	4	16	35	34	7	3	99
			% within Interact-Share and Comment	4.0%	16.2%	35.4%	34.3%	7.1%	3.0%	100.0%
			% within Type of Blog	80.0%	69.6%	77.8%	82.9%	87.5%	60.0%	78.0%
		No	Count	1	7	10	7	1	2	28
			% within Interact-Share and Comment	3.6%	25.0%	35.7%	25.0%	3.6%	7.1%	100.0%
			% within Type of Blog	20.0%	30.4%	22.2%	17.1%	12.5%	40.0%	22.0%
	Total		Count	5	23	45	41	8	5	127
			% within Interact-Share and Comment	3.9%	18.1%	35.4%	32.3%	6.3%	3.9%	100.0%
			% within Type of Blog	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Informal Tone of Voice	Interact-Share and Comment	yes	Count	1	7	15	11	2		36
			% within Interact-Share and Comment	2.8%	19.4%	41.7%	30.6%	5.6%		100.0%
			% within Type of Blog	100.0%	70.0%	88.2%	78.6%	50.0%		78.3%
		No	Count	0	3	2	3	2		10
			% within Interact-Share and Comment	0.0%	30.0%	20.0%	30.0%	20.0%		100.0%
			% within Type of Blog	0.0%	30.0%	11.8%	21.4%	50.0%		21.7%
	Total		Count	1	10	17	14	4		46
			% within Interact-Share and Comment	2.2%	21.7%	37.0%	30.4%	8.7%		100.0%
			% within Type of Blog	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%
Others	Interact-Share and Comment	yes	Count		1	5	8	2		16
			% within Interact-Share and Comment		6.2%	31.2%	50.0%	12.5%		100.0%
			% within Type of Blog		100.0%	55.6%	88.9%	100.0%		76.2%
		No	Count		0	4	1	0		5
			% within Interact-Share and Comment		0.0%	80.0%	20.0%	0.0%		100.0%
			% within Type of Blog		0.0%	44.4%	11.1%	0.0%		23.8%
	Total		Count		1	9	9	2		21
			% within Interact-Share and Comment		4.8%	42.9%	42.9%	9.5%		100.0%
			% within Type of Blog		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%

To validate that "media diversity" is conclusive in terms of driving people to change the sources they obtain news from, based on the various topics they tackle, a cross-tabulation (table 2) displays the relation between whether respondents interact with blogs (i.e. comment and share), the reasons why they do it, and the types of blogs they are mostly interested in. Thus, 78% participants of both genders actively interact versus 22% who don't. 38.4% of the 86 (36.2%) interactive respondents who chose freedom of expression as a reason for interacting, selected entertainment as a type of blogs, 36% selected technology, and 15% selected politics respectively. Nonetheless, 35.4% of the 99 (41.7%) interactive respondents who chose variety of new topics selected as a type of blogs, 34.3% selected technology, 16.2% selected politics. 41.7% of the 36 (15.18%) interactive respondents who chose informal tone of voice as a reason for interacting, selected entertainment as a type, 30.6% selected technology, and 19.4% selected politics.

Table 3: Preferences of Blogs over Traditional Media Based vs Preferences of Reporting by Bloggers instead of Journalists Cross-tabulation

			Preferences of Reporting by Bloggers Instead of Journalists			
			Yes	No	Depends on the Topic	Total
Prefer Blogs over Traditional Media	Yes	Count	142	72	42	256
		% within Prefer Blogs over Traditional Media	55.5%	28.1%	16.4%	100.0%
		% within Preferences of Reporting by Bloggers Instead of Journalists	79.8%	92.3%	87.5%	84.2%
	No	Count	36	6	6	48
		% within Prefer Blogs over Traditional Media	75.0%	12.5%	12.5%	100.0%
		% within Preferences of Reporting by Bloggers Instead of Journalists	20.2%	7.7%	12.5%	15.8%
Total		Count	178	78	48	304
		% within Prefer Blogs over Traditional Media	58.6%	25.7%	15.8%	100.0%
		% within Preferences of Reporting by Bloggers Instead of Journalists	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

To assess the application of "functional equivalence" sub-theory in the sense that new media have a potential to replace old ones, Communication Arts students of different age categories were asked if they prefer blogs over traditional media. 55.5% of the 84.2% who prefer blogs over traditional media also prefer bloggers reporting of news instead of that of journalists, 16.4% of the 84.2% who prefer blogs over traditional media answered by depending on the topic. Thus, what is important from this table is that 84.2% of those youngsters prefer blogs over traditional media, which enticed the researchers to pose a hypothesis for further accurate results.

Table 4: The Chi-Square test of Independence between Preferences of Blogs over Traditional Media Based vs Preferences of Reporting by Bloggers instead of Journalists

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.870[a]	2	.032
Likelihood Ratio	7.465	2	.024
N of Valid Cases	304		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.58.

To test the dependency of Preferences of Blogs over Traditional Media vs Preferences of Reporting by Bloggers instead of Journalists, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H_0: *Students don't prefer the news reported by bloggers instead of journalists*
H_1: *Students prefer the news reported by bloggers instead of journalists*

From the top row of the table, Pearson Chi-Square statistic, $\chi^2 = 6.870a$, and p = 0.032; i.e., a small probability of the observed data under the null hypothesis of no relationship. The null hypothesis is rejected, since $p < 0.05$. Therefore, H1 is confirmed verifying that the majority of students prefer blogs

over traditional media since they prefer the news reported by bloggers over those reported by journalists, with some of them relating their preferences to the topics content.

Table 5: Are Blogs Becoming the New Way of News Reporting vs Changes in Journalism Industry Caused by Blogs Popularity Cross-tabulation

			Changes in Journalism Industry Caused by Blogs Popularity				
			Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Stronly Disagree	Total
Are Blogs Becoming the New Way for News Reportings	Yes	Count	70	100	14	15	199
		% within Are Blogs Becoming the New Way for News Reportings	35.2%	50.3%	7.0%	7.5%	100.0%
		% within Changes in Journalism Industry Caused by Blogs Popularity	63.6%	66.7%	60.9%	71.4%	65.5%
	No	Count	10	20	5	6	41
		% within Are Blogs Becoming the New Way for News Reportings	24.4%	48.8%	12.2%	14.6%	100.0%
		% within Changes in Journalism Industry Caused by Blogs Popularity	9.1%	13.3%	21.7%	28.6%	13.5%
	Probably	Count	30	30	4	0	64
		% within Are Blogs Becoming the New Way for News Reportings	46.9%	46.9%	6.2%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Changes in Journalism Industry Caused by Blogs Popularity	27.3%	20.0%	17.4%	0.0%	21.1%

More about "functional equivalence", the above cross-tabulation presents that 65.5% of respondents are convinced that blogs are becoming the new way of news reporting since 35.2% of the 65.5 % strongly agree and 50.3% of the 65.5% agree that changes in the journalism industry is caused by blogs popularity.

Table 6: The Chi-Square test of Independence between "Changes in Journalism Industry Caused by Blogs Popularity" and "Are Blogs Becoming the New Way of News Reporting"

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.229[a]	6	.040
Likelihood Ratio	16.638	6	.011
N of Valid Cases	304		

a. 4 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.83.

To assess the influence of blogs popularity on the ways journalists report their news, the researchers posed the following hypothesis:

H_0: The blogosphere will not cause changes in the way journalists report news
H_1: The blogosphere will cause changes in the way journalists report news

From the top row of the table, Pearson Chi-Square statistic, χ^2 = 13.229a, and p = 0.04; i.e., a small probability of the observed data under the null hypothesis of no relationship. The null hypothesis is rejected, since p < 0.05. Therefore, H1 is confirmed proving that blogs popularity affects the journalism

industry and the way journalists report their news, and is most likely to become the new way of reporting news.

Table 7: Do You Have Your Own Blog vs When You Graduate will you be Active in the Blogosphere Cross-tabulation

			When you Graduate Will You be Active in the Blogsphere		Total
			Yes	No	
Do You Have Your Own Blog	Yes	Count	55	109	164
		% within Do You Have Your Own Blog	33.5%	66.5%	100.0%
		% within When you Graduate Will You be Active in the Blogsphere	35.0%	74.1%	53.9%
	No	Count	102	38	140
		% within Do You Have Your Own Blog	72.9%	27.1%	100.0%
		% within When you Graduate Will You be Active in the Blogsphere	65.0%	25.9%	46.1%
Total		Count	157	147	304
		% within Do You Have Your Own Blog	51.6%	48.4%	100.0%
		% within When you Graduate Will You be Active in the Blogsphere	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

To explain whether the digital blogosphere will cause the death of journalism or its continuity, future reporters (students) were asked if they already have their own blogs. 53.9% have blogs compared with 46.1% who don't. However, 72.9% of those who don't have blogs are willing to become active in the blogosphere when they graduate.

Table 8: The Chi-Square test of Independence between "Do You Have Your Own Blog" and "When you Graduate Will You be Active in the Blogosphere"

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	46.759[a]	1	.000		
Continuity Correction[b]	45.198	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	48.160	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
N of Valid Cases	304				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 67.70.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

To examine how traditional journalism will change over time by having the future graduate journalists taking the places of the old retired ones, researchers proposed the following:

H_0: Communication Arts students who don't have blogs will not become active in the blogosphere after   graduation

H_1: Communication Arts students who don't have blogs will become active in the blogosphere after   graduation

From the top row of the table, Pearson Chi-Square statistic, $\chi^2 = 46.759a$, and p = 0.0005; i.e., a small probability of the observed data under the null hypothesis of no relationship. The null hypothesis is rejected, since p < 0.05. Therefore, H1 is confirmed indicating that despite the fact that Communication Arts students of all three chosen majors in the sample don't have their own blogs while they are still in college, they have the tendency of becoming active in the blogosphere after they graduate.

5. Conclusions

Here, a pivotal question lies. Are journalists becoming like bloggers, or bloggers envying journalists for their lavish lives in the midst of action, thus becoming like them? Or is it the news reporting field that is manipulating both players by its intricate web of desire to shine? Journalists have the advantage over this field since they monopolized news reporting since its history. But if the Internet had existed back then, would bloggers be as important of a game changers as they are now? There is no such thing as monopoly anymore when it comes to information. It is offered to all and by all; that is the future in a world rushing to capture and devour all knowledge and ideas around it.

Moreover, the statistics generated from a sample of Lebanese Communication Arts students majoring in journalism, public relations, and radio/television revealed that they are all young females and males with 44.8% females versus 43% males relying on blogs as a source for the information they log on to and this made blogs the highest source among others. Such statistics confirmed the first two research questions that interrogated the growing popularity of blogs among youngsters.

Consequently, "media diversity" sub-theory, as the third research question, analyzed in table 2 appeared to be also a reason for people to interact with blogs since 78% of participants already did for many reasons like freedom of expression (36.2%), variety of new topics (41.7%), and informal tone of voice (15.18%). The majority of those who shared and commented on blogs (interacted) did it mostly for entertainment and technology and only few were interested in politics.

Furthermore, "frequency equivalence" sub-theory, as the forth research question, was reinforced in table 3 and table 4 due to the participants' preference to read news form blogs, websites, and social media over traditional media, it was interesting to note that 84.2% (table 3.1)of those youngsters preferred blogs over traditional media. In addition, the results of the Chi-square test (table 3.2) showed that (p = 0.032) verified that the majority of students preferred blogs over traditional media and preferred the way bloggers report news over the way journalists do. For this, it is interesting to study the evolution of the younger generation with every technological advancement noted.

More about "functional equivalence", (table 4.1) presents that 65.5% of respondents are convinced that blogs are becoming the new way of news reporting and they will create changes in the journalism industry due to their popularity. This result was verified later in (table 4.2) with Pearson Chi-Square result of (p = 0.04).

As for the fifth research question, to explain whether the digital blogosphere will cause the death of journalism or its continuity, (table 5.1) revealed that 53.9% participants had blogs compared with 46.1% who didn't. However, 72.9% of those who didn't have blogs are willing to become active in the blogosphere when they graduate. Such findings were further approved by the results of the Chi-square

test results (p = 0005). Such findings remain an indicator of what could become of the Lebanese blogosphere and its growing popularity.

Nevertheless, whether the Gutenberg printing press, the Telegraph Wire or the Internet, that art and science of news reporting and other forms of writing has been made possible by technology, with an evolution continuing and accelerating because the challenges of keeping a pace of technological change. There is no certainty when it comes to the future. As William Gibson said in an interview on the radio show Fresh Air, NPR in 1993 "the future is already here — it's just unevenly distributed."

6. Recommendations

This study was conducted in an attempt to prove that blogging is creating changes in the journalism industry and to assess blogs' prevalence amongst the Lebanese population, mainly the students belonging to the communication arts field. A remarkable amount of entrants followed blogs and preferred them over traditional media, believing they have an effect on public opinion and can lead to movements regarding underground issues. While a slight amount admitted having a blog, the majority would like to work or be involved in the blogosphere in the future; it is still an indicator of what could be in the future the norm in the news industry.

Nevertheless, it is essential to introduce Media Literacy in schools and universities since this generation of communication arts students is the one who will shape the fate of mass communication and news. Media Literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media; a process which enables people to become critical thinkers. It teaches people to recognize the information presented to them as being fake or reliable, while at the same time creating their own content based on ethical principles and social responsibility. This will help future generations to avoid fake news and click baits that are nowadays filling social media and are shadowing any form of online publication. Following media literacy and ethics of publication will better guide content writers and readers.

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